

Retrouvaille

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/1015471) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/1015471>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Choose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	Gen , M/M
Fandom:	Free!
Relationship:	Nanase Haruka/Tachibana Makoto , Nanase Haruka & Tachibana Makoto , Hazuki Nagisa & Ryuugazaki Rei , Hazuki Nagisa/Ryuugazaki Rei , Matsuoka Rin & Tachibana Makoto
Character:	Nanase Haruka , Tachibana Makoto , Hazuki Nagisa , Ryuugazaki Rei , Matsuoka Rin , Tachibana Ran
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe , Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence , Amnesia , Short-Term Memory Loss , Anterograde Amnesia , POV First Person , Fluffy Angst , ...is there such a thing though?? , now with fifty percent less angst than I originally envisioned , Drowning , Implied/Referenced Suicide , Rei is a badass and he won't let you forget it , I am pretty sure AO3 tagging does not work this way... , Future Fic , Fluff and Angst , Angst and Humor , Angst with a Happy Ending
Language:	English
Series:	Part 1 of Retrouvaille
Stats:	Published: 2013-10-23 Completed: 2013-12-01 Chapters: 5/5 Words: 21977

Retrouvaille

by [kamennosugao](#)

Summary

A MakoHaru AU fic, with the special participation of anterograde amnesia. In a world where Makoto Tachibana and Haruka Nanase don't grow up together, an elementary school teacher meets, befriends, and falls in love with an introverted freelance painter. Normally this would be where a happy ending would go, but unfortunately, life isn't that clear-cut. (1.21 UPDATE: Chapter 6, preview of the Tumblr-exclusive epilogue written for the [MakoHaru festival](#), which can be read [here](#).)

Notes

[This fic has an FST!!](#)

- Inspired by ["I will fall in love with you over and over..."](#) by dostmotherknowyou
- Inspired by [Untitled first drafts of what would soon become "Retrouvaille"](#) by patriciaselina

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

...if you forget the way, I'll be waiting.

–I Believe, Shin Seung Hoon

When I was a little boy, I made a promise.

Yeah, I know, I know, little kids just can't help but make promises they can't keep. I'm an elementary school teacher, for goodness' sake, how many times have I heard my pupils promise their friends the moon? Promise their crushes the world? For a child, promises are just empty words. Not exactly something set in stone.

So I know it's ridiculous that even up to now I still keep mine with me. It's a moot point, of course, seeing as I obviously didn't fulfill it, but –

– but if *he* were still here, I swear I'd be singing a different tune. It's *him* we're talking about, after all. If he hadn't left, surely I'd be able to keep that promise. Easily.

It would be cowardly of me to blame it all on something so arbitrary as distance, but the fact is that he left Iwatobi, left Japan, and I never heard from him again. So hey, nobody knew of his new contact details, and he – *expectedly* – didn't even have a social media profile or a Google search result, what was a guy like me supposed to do?

Unfortunately, though, the answer had been simple: *nothing*. There was nothing I could do to find him. And who's to say he still wanted to be found, especially by a fussy old guy who calls himself their “best friend”?

So for me, there was simply no other choice but to go on as usual.

Don't get me wrong – I'm not exactly unhappy with my life. Quite the contrary, in fact – I graduated from a good university in Tokyo, and now I'm teaching in the same halls we once used to spend our childhood. The pay's not that good, but it gets me by, and sometimes I get the time to meet up with my friends on the weekends. People ask me why I'm not married yet.

Basically, I'm living a pretty normal life.

Sometimes, though, I can't help but think: how would things have gone, if *he* were still here? Would it have been for the better, or for the worse?

How would things have gone, had I gotten the chance to keep my promise?

I'm the Japanese-language teacher in Iwatobi Elementary. The good part is that I get to teach what I know; the bad thing is that, as with every line of work that deals with children, one requires a godly amount of patience.

My patience levels may not still be up to god-tier status, but I've sure got a hell of a lot of patience.

After all, I've grown up with two hyperactive younger siblings, and a pair of friends so wonderfully eccentric they may as well have been my younger siblings, as well.

And, of course, though our time may have been short, I had grown up with *him*, too. He wasn't exactly the easiest person to care for, believe me. I don't think I can count how many times the only thing stopping us from being jailed for indecent exposure, or trespassing, had been our status as minors.

So, yeah, I guess I *can* handle teaching restless first-graders the basics of *kana*, but right now – right now I must be coming down with something. I must be, because there's no other reason for my head to hurt, is there?

The last time we were on the phone, Nagisa said I must have been overthinking myself again. Apparently that's how Rei gets his own migraines...but I don't think I've been particularly introspective for a while now, so I decide to put my faith in pain-killers instead. And caffeine, I still have next period so yes, I think I really do need coffee.

There's still enough time for me to squeeze a walk in, so that's what I do. Near the school is a small stall selling coffees and fruit shakes, and don't tell anyone but I really like their lattés better than the ones I get in school. It's along the way to a park, and from here you can see the ocean.

From my viewpoint, the ocean is just close enough to see the waves, but not close enough for me to imagine myself being lapped up by it.

If anyone were to know about this irrational fear of the ocean I have – imagine, an *adult*, scared of the ocean! – surely no one would ever take me seriously. But I just can't help it – how can I, when the ocean seems intent on taking stuff away from me?

And as if my old fisherman friend wasn't enough...I heard that *he* took a boat out of Japan, too.

The ocean really had it in for me, I swear. It's a good thing I've quit swimming long ago – maybe, if I were to swim now, it would've taken *me*, too. It's as if I was the main character in a horror movie, and the ocean was just fulfilling some weird, all-important prophecy.

“Ugh...*what am I thinking?*”

Guess Nagisa really *was* right, and I really *am* overthinking myself. Wonder if I should call him up, see if he's got any tips for me...

“Probably nothing important,” someone mumbles. I turn to look at him, equal parts surprised and terrified – he's *right beside me*, how have I not noticed him there in the first place?

“I'm sorry,” I say, partly because it's true and partly because he isn't looking at me, and for some reason I want him to, and...usually people look at other people when they're speaking. He doesn't seem to fit the ‘usual’ part, however, because he's still dead-focused on whatever he's doing – was that a painting? “I didn't see you there.”

“People usually don't,” the other man tells me, applying another stroke of paint to the canvas. “They don't usually apologize, though. So why did you?”

“Well, maybe I was getting in the way of your...painting.” I look down, away from his dark hair or the precise, graceful way his hands hold the paintbrush, to see the *ocean*. It shouldn't be possible for someone to exactly capture the way the ocean waves lapped at the shore, but apparently it was, because here he was and that's exactly what he did. “I think I wasn't, though, because that's *beautiful*! Have you been painting long?”

There's a faint hint of red to the other man's cheekbones now, which I *definitely* did not notice because I was looking at him for too long, *no*. "N-not exactly," he replies, and his grip on the paintbrush is so strong that I was scared it would break. "I *think* I've been drawing stuff since I was a little child, maybe. I can't be sure."

"I knew someone who drew so well, too," I say, and heaven must be playing a cruel joke on me because I keep getting reminded of *him* so much lately. Why now, though?

"Hmm?" the other man mumbles. He's still busy touching up on the painting – what *can* he touch up on that thing, anyway, it looks *perfect* to me – but he isn't exactly shooing me away, so I decide to translate that sound as "*carry on, then*".

"He was always such a genius. And, well, he did get to study abroad, after all...yeah. Maybe right now, he's just as great as you!"

The painter must be done by now, because he's dunked the paintbrush in a glass of water. The water turns a nice familiar shade of sky blue. "He won't be a genius anymore."

"Pardon?"

"Besides," he says, wearily, fixing me with a Glare that scares me and yet seems utterly, *painfully* familiar. "Aren't you late for class?"

"What do you mean –" And because fate is feeling particularly cruel to me right now, of course, he's exactly right. "– oh! Sorry, guess I'll have to meet you again tomorrow, Mister...?"

He flinches, but I can't fathom if it's from annoyance at having to see me again or genuine discomfort at...something. "It doesn't matter. I won't be seeing you tomorrow, anyway."

"Maybe I won't," I say. "But maybe I will. Anyway, I'm Makoto Tachibana, and it's been nice meeting you!"

I take off in an ungraceful run, which is unfortunate because I don't get to see if he has anything to say in reply, and also necessary because I don't think I could make it back in time if I use my usual pace. I don't know his name, but it's okay – surely a painter on that stretch of walkway would stick out like a sore thumb?

Call me crazy or whatever, but I have the feeling I'm gonna see this guy around.

Sure enough, the next day, there he is again, starting work on another painting without any care in the world...it seems to be a similar painting from yesterday, but I'm just approaching him so I can't be too sure.

"Hello!" I say, smiling at the painter as I make my way towards the same spot I stood yesterday. "Another ocean painting again? You must really love the ocean."

He stops painting, frowns, and then starts again. "Yes, I do, but what's it to you?" He's still applying precise brushstrokes, but – for some reason – he seems *angrier* than he was yesterday. "I don't know who you are."

I think that maybe he didn't understand what I said yesterday, or maybe he didn't hear it? I was in a hurry, after all. "I'm Makoto Tachibana! I told you my name yesterday, but I guess you didn't hear me well...I'm sorry."

For a moment, just a single moment, the painter's face falls. But he bites his lower lip and somehow regains composure, still painting, still not looking at me. "It's fine. I don't usually know people...dunno why you'd be apologizing about it, though."

"Well, I immediately assumed you knew me, which could be considered rude." I say, cradling the cardboard coffee cup in my hands. The kids were on some kind of field trip – I *could* have joined in, but I didn't. Why did I? Was it all because of this – because I wanted to see this painter guy again?

I'm overthinking again, so instead of answering my own questions I decide to take a big gulp of my latté. Still delicious, as per usual.

"Nn." the painter mumbles, lips thinned into a straight line as he painstakingly puts details on the crests of the ocean waves. Now that I look at it, it *does* look exactly like the one he made yesterday...

Speaking of yesterday. "Yesterday, you knew I was a teacher, without me having to say so."

"Really? I told you?" the painter says, and even if his eyes are impeccably void of emotion, I think there's a genuine sense of intrigue in his tone of voice.

"Yeah. You told me I was late for class..." I say, looking over the actual ocean in thought. "How did you know that?"

"I won't even bother remembering the details, that's requires too much effort." he replies, punctuating the last words with three rough jabs of his paintbrush. Suddenly there's a ray of sunlight piercing the ocean waves. "But it's *obvious*. No one but the elementary students use that way – and you're obviously *not* an elementary student."

"Guess I really am not." I say, chuckling. At six feet, I easily cut an impressive figure, which bodes well when one has to loom over precocious little children who can't help but push their limits in all the wrong ways. "If you don't mind me asking how you knew I was gonna be *late*, though?"

"Probably a shot in the dark." the painter says, looking at his painting from this side, then the other. "Maybe I just wanted you to get away from me."

That should hurt, it really should, but I'm not one to stick where I'm not wanted, so I decide to ask. "Do you want me to get away from you, right now?"

His hand stills, and from what I can see of his eyes he genuinely looks startled. He manages to rein it in, though, and he dunks the paintbrush in the water, again. "No," he replies, and there it is, that surprised little tilt to his voice. "You...you're nice. Or, at least, you seem to be."

"Oh, thanks." I murmur. I don't need to look at a reflective surface to know that there is a high probability that right now, my cheeks have turned red. I'd have blamed it on the sun, but today's sky is relatively overcast.

He paints, in silence, and I stand beside him, alternately sipping my latté and looking at his painting. Compared to yesterday, there seems to be a whole lot more detail going into this one – or maybe I ran off just as he was going to go into detail?

Suddenly, the painter speaks up. "'When you're ten, they call you a prodigy.'"

"Huh?"

“‘When you’re fifteen, they call you a genius. Once you hit twenty, you’re just an ordinary person.’ My grandma told me that, before.” He looks up at me, and I swear it’s a miracle I didn’t go through cardiac arrest right then and there, really, because *who the hell even has eyes that blue??* “I dunno why I said that. I just thought I had to tell you.”

I remember what he told me yesterday, then – *he won’t be a genius anymore.*

“Well, my friend’s birthday comes earlier than mine, so he’s past twenty by now, I’m sure.” I say, smiling warily at memories I had been trying not to remember. “I don’t know what happened to him ever since, but I’m pretty sure ‘ordinary’ and ‘Haru’ don’t belong in the same sentence.”

And right there, I catch myself. I’ve lasted years without having to say or even *think* his name, and there, there it is. It’s a good thing I’ve finished my latté by now, because I don’t think I’d forgive myself if I spilled my coffee on his immaculately perfect painting.

“Your friend’s name...is ‘Haru’?” he asks, and I shouldn’t be able to decipher this man’s thoughts through the subtle nuances in his voice but I *do*, and it makes me feel uneasy and familiar all at once.

How’s that for a paradox.

“His name is Haruka, actually.” I reply, uncertain as to whether or not I should be volunteering this much information about my childhood best friend to a complete stranger. “When we were little I used to call him ‘Haru’...he never really did like having a, in his words, ‘girly first name’. I get where he’s coming from – well, my ‘Makoto’ isn’t the usual one, either, but I don’t think it matters...”

“I know the feeling.” the painter says. “My name’s *Haruka*, too.”

That was around a month ago, now, since I’ve first met Haruka. Since then I’ve been re-organizing my time to make sure I have an extra few minutes to meet him at the usual space – *his* usual space, because of course it’d be presumptuous of me to call it *our* usual space – and sometimes I bring him water.

As if it wasn’t enough that he paints the ocean every damned day, water’s all he ever drinks. No, seriously. I don’t think I’d ever forget what happened the last time, when I had the bright idea to bring him coffee. He did, though, which was a relief.

Here’s another thing I’ve noticed about Haruka in the month I’ve known him – he has a *horrible* memory. I’m probably off the mark as usual, but I can’t help but liken it to the times my students claim they’ve forgotten this character or that, only to use them when passing notes in class.

Every day, I greet him, and he acts as standoffish as the day I first met him. Then I say... something, of which I’m not exactly sure, and though he won’t really say he remembers me out loud, he eventually mellows into more comfortable company.

It’s nice having someone to talk to once in a while, really. Ran and Ren are busy with their own lives, Mum and Dad are off somewhere in the cruise they’re on for their anniversary, Rei moved to Tokyo, and Nagisa was close behind. Little children are nice, but they’re not particularly good conversationalists, and I’m not particularly close with my fellow faculty, who are across-the-board older than me.

Haruka, on the other hand, always seems to just be right there. It makes sense how he fits in just so with the ocean and the breeze and the rest of the walkway – he’s a fixed point, so much so that I

seriously worry as to whether or not if he's got a home to go back to at night. Apparently he does, though, because when I get home from school he's no longer there.

"I think I used to be a swimmer." he says, breaking our comfortable silence.

"How so?" I ask.

"I can't remember going into any tournaments, or whatever." he says, carefully, as if he's worried he might break something with just his voice, which is a silly metaphor but also an accurate one.

"But for some reason, when I look at water, I just feel complete."

Now that's something I haven't heard for a while now. As if it wasn't enough that he shared Haru's name and dark hair, he had to share Haru's love for water, too. If the universe really was playing a cosmic joke on me, they're really putting a lot of effort into it.

"I've heard that before, actually." I tell him. "I can't say I don't know what you feel, but...yeah. I've heard that before."

"The weirdest thing is that I can't ever remember getting in the water." Haruka continues on, as if he hadn't heard me at all. "My mom – she told me I should never swim, and she never told me why, but she sounded so worried so yeah, fine, I decided maybe it won't be a big price to pay, just so she could just stop fussing."

"But I spend every day in front of this damned ocean, and I dunno why but I have the feeling I *shouldn't* have made that promise. To never swim again, I mean."

"That makes two of us, then, though I didn't stop swimming by force."

"You used to be a swimmer, too?"

"Yeah...but I was in elementary, then, it's such a long time ago, now." I reply, scratching the back of my neck in embarrassment. "I stopped when Haru left. He's the one who got me into it in the first place; it didn't mean anything without him."

"Oh." Haruka says, visibly distraught. I don't know why, but for some reason he has let go of the paintbrush, and his hand reaches up to clutch at his heart. There is no other word I could use to describe him, other than *lost*.

"Haruka-san...are you okay?" I say, reaching down.

Without thinking about what I am doing, my hand ends up tilting his face up to look at mine, and *oh dear Lord those eyes shouldn't be getting me each and every time*, but they do.

Haruka's eyes widen as he turns redder by the second, and the situation is just so awkward so I wrench my hand away and relocate it to a place as far away from his person as is possible. I think he could hear my heart beating wildly in my chest.

I also think I need help. Preferably professional help...if Nagisa were here he'd probably remind me that Rei's a professional, too, but he's an accountant. I don't think knowing the meaning behind cash flows would help me with this problem of mine...

Oh, but apparently it does. Thank you, boys, wherever you are – crisis averted.

"...sorry."

“You don’t have to apologize,” Haruka replies, in that impassionate drawl of his I’ve grown so accustomed to lately. He’s working on another detail of ocean painting number thirty-one, and I am intrigued because he’s using flesh-colored paint. He hasn’t used flesh-colored paint before, so I tell him.

“I didn’t know you paid so much attention to my paint choices, Makoto.”

“I don’t, really. It’s just that you always paint *oceans* – and I think there aren’t flesh-toned stretches of ocean water.” I say, then come to a halt. “Wait...you aren’t going to paint...people dying in the ocean, right?”

“There was a well-known story, once.” the painter says, blending and re-blending his paints on his palette. “About these swimmers who went out at night, a flickering oil lamp, a sudden open wound, and a shark –”

Being a grown man clinging onto a railing, wailing for dear life, in broad daylight, is not the best situation to be in.

It *really* isn’t.

You have to trust me on this.

“N-no, sorry, my bad.” Haruka says, and now he’s standing up from his usual position to approach me. Standing up he’s a good two inches shorter than me, which is arbitrary but somehow expected, all the same. “I was just joking, Makoto.”

“You scared me, though.” I retort, knowing full well how childish I sound like. “Horror stories aren’t exactly my forte.”

“Okay.” the painter replies, voice somehow strained. From what my peripheral vision can see his hands seem to be out to grasp my shoulders, and once he sees me seeing them, Haruka moves away, slowly, carefully, back down onto his usual place.

“That’s another thing that bugs me, though.”

“Hm.” Haruka grunts, which I translate as grudging approval.

“Is there a reason why you call me just ‘Makoto’, though?” Seeing as I have known him all of one month, this should’ve been something I commented on from the start, seeing as we’re not exactly childhood friends and all...but. But for some reason, hearing Haruka call me ‘Makoto’ seems to me like the most natural thing in the world.

“I...don’t know why, either. But it just seems right for me to call you ‘Makoto’. Do you mind?”

“N-no, not really.” I reply, wishing Haruka won’t look at me so he won’t see my cheeks burning up. “Then, would it be fine for me to call you ‘Haruka’? To even the playing field.”

“I won’t mind,” the painter says, carefully again. “I probably won’t remember agreeing, anyway.”

“Ahh, that’s another thing.” I muse, turning to face him. “I’ve noticed that you have a pretty bad memory.”

“I do?” Haruka asks, and he actually looks confused.

“Yes, you do.” I say, scowling. “You forgot that you agreed to eat something that wasn’t mackerel,

the other day.”

“Mackerel is a *perfectly reasonable* energy source and I have no idea why you’re so against it.”

“Anyway, haven’t you tried writing stuff down on a notebook? That apparently helps with memory problems.”

“I’ve tried, but.” Haruka starts, but suddenly stops speaking. When he does continue the sentence, though, it’s quiet, almost imperceptible. “But I don’t know where I should start.”

“How’s this, then?” I say, plucking a small spiral-bound notepad from my back pocket – just my luck I was going to grab groceries for today, so I just rip off the sheet with the list on it and write something across the first line of the otherwise-blank first page.

I hand Haruka both the pen and the pad, and he momentarily recoils but otherwise accepts.

“Thank you...oh.”

It’s probably troublesome of me, and a little bit egotistical, but the words I have written on the first page in dark black ink, is ‘*Makoto Tachibana*’.

“Let’s see if you won’t ask me who I am tomorrow, huh?” I say, almost playfully, but...I mean it.

I really *do* want Haruka to remember me tomorrow. As well as the day after that, and the day after that...but maybe that would be pushing things.

Maybe that would be me, subconsciously wishing for something different from what we have now.

“...okay.” Haruka murmurs, holding on to my notepad with both hands. “*We’ll* see.”

Chapter End Notes

To Be Continued.

...hopefully soon. This is either going to turn up to be either a two-parter or a three-parter...it was supposed to be a oneshot, but I started writing this at eleven and it’s one o’clock in the morning now, and I’m sleepy. So that’s that for now, I guess. It’s still relatively fluffy. Can’t say the same for the next chapters, though.

Title from [here](#).

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

In this chapter: Haruka begins to paint something that isn't just the ocean, Makoto is greatly distracted by his new friend's...err, attractiveness, and the both of them go out for lunch. It's not a date, seriously.

Chapter Notes

For Rei's POV of this chapter (as well as of part of chapter 3), please be redirected to [chapter 5 of *The Materiality Principle*](#).

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

He looks at me warily, the next time we meet. It's not immediate recognition, but this time, he's looking *at* me, not *past* me, so I guess I could count that as a baby step.

"You're... 'Makoto'?" Haruka says, hands itching to reach for the notepad in his pocket. I wonder, did he write anything else about me? But it's not my place to look.

"Yup. Good afternoon, Haruka." I reply, ruffling his hair as I walk past him to my usual spot. He makes a little startled noise that throws me completely off-guard, so it's a miracle my voice doesn't crack when I continue speaking. "See, I told you it would work!"

"...I still don't remember you saying that, though. But *fine*." he painter replies, scoffing. As per usual, he's painting yet another ocean - only, this time, with the same flesh-colored paint he had been blending before.

"You never did say what that was for." I say.

"What are you talking about?" Haruka asks, confused as per usual.

"That." I point to the little, out-of-place tube of watercolor beside its mostly-blue brethren. "I was referring to the new paint color."

"Oh, that? It's nothing." Haruka replies calmly, though his brushstrokes grow a bit frantic. The guy tenses up about the smallest of things and sometimes it just makes me want to bundle him up in my arms and hug him, but that would be *awkward*. "I'm just trying to figure something out."

"You know you can tell me about it, right?"

"Why would I?"

"I'm a teacher, Haruka." I say, giving that luxuriously fake sigh I give when Ran and Ren don't trust me with their homework. "So I guess that means I'm *fantastic* at figuring things out."

Haruka raises an eyebrow at me, somehow amused. "I thought that only applied for Math teachers.

Because of all the problem-solving they do.”

“I hope that isn’t true, because I’m *terrible* at Math.” I say, groaning.

“Fine, then, I’ll tell you.” Haruka concedes, turning back to his canvas – had he really been looking at me *the entire time*? That’s something he doesn’t usually do. Right now, he seems to be painting...someone’s back. Huh. “There’s this guy who keeps popping up in my dreams lately. I think I know him.”

I never really had any concrete cause of Haruka’s constant forgetfulness, but I’ve watched so much – *too* much of my sister’s dramas to decide that it must be some form of amnesia. “You’re not *sure*?”

“That’s the thing, Makoto – when it comes to my past, I’m *never* sure.” he replies, taking another tube of watercolor that isn’t from the pile of blue paints. He looks sad, and *angry*. Looks like I’ve said the wrong thing, then. “All I know is that I *probably* used to swim, I *probably* used to study art, and I *probably* used to know people. And that’s...*it*, really. The only thing I really *am* sure about is that my name is Haruka *n* – never mind.”

Haruka cuts himself short, biting his lip for some reason, as if the next words he was about to say were not intended for me. If he’s so uncomfortable, I think it’d be better for me – for both of us – not to push it.

“It’s fine, Haruka. I...” I’m about to say ‘*I understand*’, but I *don’t* and Haruka’s not a child; empty words won’t help us now. “...I don’t need you to tell me *everything*.”

“...’s my bad.” the painter replies, eyes downcast yet again. The figure on the painting has brown hair, now. “I didn’t mean to snap at you.”

“It’s fine, and you didn’t snap at me.” I say, using the tone of voice one would have better luck using on cornered animals. “A friend told me one that ‘probably’ is more than fifty percent, so there’s that, too.”

“Is this ‘friend’ of yours a teacher, too?” Haruka asks, painting in shadows and highlights on the figure’s...bare back? Huh, guess it makes sense for him to be painting a swimmer in front of the ocean.

“No; he’s an accountant in Tokyo.” I say in reply, suddenly reminded of Rei and his preference of one kind of balance sheet over the other because it was ‘balanced and beautiful’. “I’m not friends with my fellow faculty...see, I’m not what you’d call the social type.”

Well, I *used* to be the social type, but...well. I was in elementary, and even then I only had exactly *three* friends. Four if I counted Aki, the nice girl who swam freestyle, just like Haru.

“That makes two of us, then.” he says. “Being around people requires too much effort. I honestly can’t see the appeal in it. But – but even if I don’t know why, I know there’s something missing. The weird thing is though, when I dream that I’m swimming, that I’m swimming with *some other people* – may be two, or three, I can’t be too sure – I feel just *fine*. Does that make any sense?”

Suddenly I am reminded of the things I know I’m missing; my best friend, our promise. But I’m not telling Haruka that, just because he reminds me of them. It just wouldn’t be fair to Haruka – to both the childhood friend Haruka I can’t find and the painter Haruka right in front of me.

“Yes, yes it does.” I say instead. “If swimming is *that* important to you, though...did your mom ever tell you why you can’t swim anymore?”

“I think she did, but I’ve forgotten what it was.” Haruka replies. “I don’t think I’ve ever remembered to ask her again.”

“Huh. Okay then.” I have my own hypothesis as to Haruka’s mother’s reasons, but...in this case, I guess the less we know the better. Maybe. I hope so. “You ever try to look for these people?”

Haruka visibly flinches, and had I either known him for longer or had a personality closer to Nagisa’s, I really would have hugged him by now. It’s just a normal, human response to other people’s anxiety, seriously! “I don’t really *remember* them. It’s just like how I don’t really remember *learning* to swim; I just know that I *can* swim. If I *do* remember them, it’s just as a really vague point of reference.”

“Too bad...knowing these people would have done you a world of good.”

“How sure can you be, though?” Haruka says, almost nonchalantly, and he’s so focused on the painting I can’t even begin to ascertain what he’s actually feeling. “It’s been such a long time since then. Maybe they don’t want to see someone who doesn’t remember them much anymore.”

Those last words of his, right there, somehow they struck a chord within me that I hadn’t noticed before. I can’t understand what it means, but it makes me want to cry, which would be confusing to us both so I look away and blink repeatedly.

“That’s not true,” I say, not even thinking of what Haruka could possibly say in return, because – because I have to tell him that even if friendship *is* a wound, time isn’t the one that heals it... probably in less abstract terms. “If someone – someone who left a long time ago, if they went out of their way to look for me, or even if they just happened to see me, and they say they’re happy to see me even if they can’t remember me much anymore...I can’t say that’s a situation I won’t like to be in, Haruka.”

He’s still looking at the painting, not my direction, and maybe he thinks I can’t see him when he opens and closes his mouth in apparent speechlessness. Like a fish. I’m about to say something to that effect, just so he doesn’t have to tire himself with his thoughts that just can’t seem to form words, but he speaks up. “...right. Your ‘childhood friend’.”

When he says that, he almost seems happy, and I can’t for the life of me see why, but I guess that’s fine.

“Yes, the childhood friend. I’m not saying everyone’s like me...”

“But they *should* be,” Haruka mutters, under his breath, and my cheeks flare up so much that I’m very glad he isn’t looking at me right now.

“...thank you. But moving on,” I continue on, still busy willing the blood away from my cheeks. “Sometimes, you just have to let people surprise you. Maybe your old friends still want to see you.”

“And if they don’t?” Haruka asks, probably attempting to sound cool, but...but he sounds lost. As if he’s falling and he doesn’t have anything to hold on to.

I know that tone of voice, because I’ve used that myself.

“...then we let them *drown*.” I say, and I surprise us both. Haruka’s probably surprised at my out-of-character hostility, and to tell the truth...*I* am, too. Why did I wish such things on the hypothetical actions of people I probably won’t ever know?

It’s probably because I know what Haru’s feeling right now, and it hurts and I don’t ever want him

to have to go through that.

...wait.

Since when did I start thinking about him as *Haru*??

“You’re running late again, Makoto.” Haru...Haruka says, pointedly looking at his wristwatch, thankfully freeing me from my inner chaos. Well. At least for a little while. “We’ll talk about it tomorrow.”

His last words break through my reverie, because it’s the first time Haruka’s mentioned ‘tomorrow’ without putting it in the same sentence as ‘won’t’ and ‘never’. “Really?”

“Sure, I can always write it down, can’t I?” Haruka replies breezily, waving my - his - little green notebook around like some sort of golden ticket. “Go.”

“Mako-chan, guess what, *guess what!*”

“Mmh, Nagisa.” I groan, wiping away the remaining traces of sleep from my eyes. See, I love Nagisa Hazuki to death, I really do, but unfortunately, though he’s mastered a whole lot of other things, *timing* has never been one of them.

Today was an especially taxing day – finals are upon us, and I barely even had the time to exchange more than a few words with Haruka – so yeah, I’d think I’d be fairly justified for not being a ray of sunshine right now. It’s *three o’clock in the morning*.

“Hmph.” Nagisa grunts in reply, and I know that right now he’s *definitely* pouting. He may have grown taller than Rei and now looks as mature as his actual age, but he’s still such a child sometimes. Well. Make that *most* times. “Here I was thinking you wouldn’t be such a stick-in-the-mud about it.”

“I’m not ‘being a stick-in-the-mud about it’, Nagisa.” I reply, carefully, because if Nagisa gets all pouty *now* he’ll wake Rei up and between the two of us I’d rather Rei be the one getting some sleep. “You didn’t even tell me what ‘it’ is.”

“Oh, right!” Nagisa replies, genuinely surprised he’d forgotten to tell me. “I just thought you’d like to know that Rei-chan and I are going visiting at the end of the month.”

“...really? But I thought Rei’s busy with his...inter...well, his statements.”

Nagisa sighs. “It’s a good thing you aren’t an Accounting professor, Mako-chan. They’re called ‘interim statements’, and no, *of course* Rei-chan would be done with them before the actual deadline, because he’s *just that good*.”

“That’s...just as expected from Rei.” I say, chuckling a little. Choking back the little sliver of bitter feelings that tell me *Rei and Nagisa have each other, what about you, what do **you** have, Makoto Tachibana?*

“One thing, though,” Nagisa says, somewhat hesitant. “You never tell us how things are at your end.”

“Well, I teach elementary students. I don’t think you’d find that interesting.” I reply, now more

than half-awake, sitting up in bed and keeping myself busy with not looking at the clock. “Life in *Tokyo*, on the other hand...”

“You could’ve been here with us too, Mako-chan.” Nagisa retorts, somewhat chidingly. “Remember that swanky elementary school? Remember the offer they made?”

“Yeah, I still do, Nagisa.” He *never* lets me forget it, after all. “But it wasn’t the best time.”

“...*right*.” Nagisa drawls, in a tone that tells me he doesn’t believe my excuse.

It’s fine, really – *I* don’t believe my excuse, either. Why *did* I not accept that offer? It’s true that Ran and Ren are still young, but they’ve long since proven to me that they’re capable of being left alone...and between the work and the stress and everything else, I don’t think I’ve been much of a capable guardian, lately. So why can’t I move away from Iwatobi?

...is it because I still childishly believe that Haru will come back and I could finally fulfill our promise?

Maybe it is, I really think that it is, but I don’t think I’ll be telling Nagisa that any time soon.

“Please tell me you’re *at least* making friends, Mako-chan.” Nagisa says, thankfully breaking into my introspection.

“Well...there is *one*.” I say, thinking how I should explain.

See, I had intended to tell Nagisa about Haruka from the very beginning, but...I don’t think he’d approve of it. When Haru – not painter Haru, *childhood friend* Haru – left, Nagisa was the one who saw how I coped. Or rather, how I *couldn’t* cope. He’d probably say something awkward but good-intentioned, like *do you remember what happened the last time you befriended a mermaid?* I don’t think I’d know what to do.

“Don’t be so shy, Mako-chan.” Nagisa croons. “Tell me about ‘em.”

“They’re a painter, and they’re very good at it.” I reply, choosing my words carefully. “They also *really* like eating fish.”

“Huh. Not as helpful as I thought, but okay.” Nagisa says, somewhat amused. “You have *got* to introduce us.”

So I guess it really *is* true that the more you wish that something *won’t* happen, the more it *does* happen. *Nice job, me*. “Why?”

“Well, we’ve got to thank them for keeping our Mako-chan company, of course.”

“You really don’t have to,” I groan. I really am not awake enough for this.

“We don’t have to, but we *want* to. There’s a *big* difference, Mako-chan.” Nagisa says, in a familiar tone of voice. I use that tone every day – when I’m explaining stuff to my youngest students. “We’ll be seeing you...next week, tops.”

“I’m looking forward to it,” I say as we end our call, even if there is an alarm ringing at the back of my head chanting *crisis mode, crisis mode*.

I have got to talk to Haruka, *fast*.

I somehow manage to get a fellow faculty member to take over for the first few minutes of my period. I owe them a drink now, though.

“My friends are coming over next week,” I tell Haruka. He’s started work on another painting – apparently he starts and finishes one each day – and I don’t know if I’ve either been busy for too long or his style has changed too suddenly, because the body of water he’s painting in now is both bluer and less violent.

It’s definitely not an ocean, at least.

Haruka grunts, once, as he always seems to do when faced with stuff he considers ‘troublesome’.

“So?”

“I think they want to meet you.”

“Then tell them I can’t meet them.” he tells me, groaning, though there seems to be something off – something that’s more than simple annoyance – behind his expression. “Simple.”

“Oh, if only *Nagisa* can be derailed by that.” I’m leaning on the railing now, head in my hands. Like a down-on-his-luck guy on one of those silly soap operas. “He’s a smart kid...*too* smart for his own good, and for ours.”

Haruka’s hand stills on the paintbrush he’s holding, and I’d swear his hand was shaking but that could’ve been a little trick of my mind, I can’t see well from this angle. “‘Nagisa’, this time,” he says, somewhat thoughtfully, as he picks up another paintbrush. “Did you guys seek each other out just for your girly names, or –”

“You’re one to talk, *Haruka*.” I say, smirking a little. “You better be thankful I never see your full name.”

“And for that I thank heaven every day.” Haruka replies, not missing a beat, and his face is so deadpan and I can’t even guess whether or not he’s joking.

But for some reason, I have the feeling that he isn’t.

“Makoto, let’s go.”

“Huh?”

“Let’s go. Somewhere else.” It is only now that I realize Haruka’s lack of paints and easel, and how he is walking towards me as I approach. “It’s your day off, isn’t it?”

Now that’s new. Not the fact that he knows it’s my day off - he *always* seems to know, somehow - but the fact that he’s willingly stepping away from his precious ocean. “Sure, Haruka. Where to?”

“Anywhere but here,” he replies, falling into step beside me. He’s so close that if I’m not careful I just might end up holding his hand, but if I did that then where would we be? “I don’t want to swim, Makoto.”

“Nobody’s forcing you to, Haruka.” I say, looking at the man beside me. His eyes are downcast as per usual, which is good because I don’t think I can bear looking at them up close. “What brought

this on?"

"I don't know. It's just that - it's just that the more I look at the ocean, the more I just want to *jump* _."

"No no no *Haru don't!*"

"Makoto." Haru says, shaking me about the shoulders. The walkway we're at is not a highly-populated area, but the few people that *are* around us are pointing and whispering. "*Makoto.*"

I belatedly realize that I've attached myself to Haru without even thinking about it, like an overgrown toddler, so I move up and away, as if I've been burnt. So much for avoiding awkwardness, Makoto Tachibana. "I'm - I'm sorry!"

Haru's cheeks are dusted with the faintest of red, and his hands are trembling as he straightens his collar. Oh crap, right, he's not a people person. I'd wager a good amount that he doesn't like being touched, either.

"I'm really sorry, Haru." I say, frantically, wishing he doesn't suddenly decide to go elsewhere. And maybe burn the notepad for good measure. "I don't know what came over me. Just - sorry."

"You don't like the ocean much, do you." Haruka tells me - there's no upward lilt, he's not asking, this time - all traces of awkwardness gone from his tone. If only I can be that nonplussed. "Makoto."

"Hmm? Ahh, no, that's not it, not exactly." Well it *was* the truth, but it's not as if I'm gonna go and say it, considering who it is I'm talking to.

"Stop lying. You're bad at it." he retorts, rolling his eyes at me, and - and had he been walking closer to me for a while now, or is that just my wishful thinking taking effect?? Oh, I have got to stop thinking like this. "I never expected you to keep coming back, after knowing that."

"...well, it's not as if I can last a day without decent coffee, Haru." I say, and Haru visibly shudders. It seems his subconscious remembers that horrible event with the coffee, after all.

"Please do not talk about coffee." Haru says, with a hand clamped over his mouth. "I have no idea why, but hearing the word doesn't make me feel well."

"Okay, then, let's just get some food in you." I say, and then look back at him. "Haru, do you even *eat*?"

Haru rolls his eyes. "Don't be absurd, Makoto. Just because you don't see me eat, doesn't mean I don't eat at all." He then points to a small restaurant just up ahead and - *I am seriously not making this up* - wraps his slender fingers around my wrist. "That one, in particular, serves good mackerel."

We're halfway there when I am acutely aware that somewhere along the way our hands slipped and his hand is in mine and *oh sweet merciful heaven* friends don't. Friends don't have these weird fuzzy feelings when they hold hands, do they? *Do they?*

Haru's face is still facing forward, laser-focused on that banner advertising half-off mackerel bowls, which is probably the reason why we had to run, and also why he can't see how I am looking at him right now. I can't see how I'm looking at him right now, either, but I am definitely sure it looks weird, so he shouldn't see it. Mustn't see it.

Whatever this is, I have to swallow it down and bear it. *Haru must never know.*

Haru actually has to sit me down on one of the stools in front of the counter, and seeing as I am both heavier and taller, this is by far not an easy task. But he manages it, quickly, and that's good, because if his fingers linger on me for longer than they should be I swear I don't know what else I should do with myself.

"One mackerel bowl, please." Haru calls out, settled in the seat beside me. "And...Makoto?"

It suddenly occurs to me that yes, I am capable of producing sounds that form words which won't embarrass me, and therefore I have no right to be staring off into nothingness here like some poor idiot. "Sorry, Haru. I was just thinking of something, is all." I say, fixing him with a smile that hopefully does look as okay as I should be.

Maybe it does, because Haru gives me this nigh-imperceptible nod before he turns away. "He'll be having curry rice. Do you have green curry, uncle?" There's a half-mumbled, half-shouted word of assent from the kitchen, so Haru nods again. "One of those, then."

"One mackerel, one green curry." repeats an older man emerging from the kitchen. "Haruka-kun! I never knew you had a boyfriend."

Haru's as impassive as ever, so I have to take it upon myself to say something, never mind the fact that my cheeks are flaring up so much right now, at the mention of that very word. *Boyfriend*. "We - we're not a couple!" I say.

Then I chuckle. Nagisa always told me that laughing something off was the ultimate solution to everything. Granted, I could've known it'd backfire, seeing as it's *Nagisa's idea* we're talking about, but the chef's laughing along and Haru's not looking at me like I've grown a third head so I guess it's fine.

"Suit yourselves, then." the older man says, heading back to the kitchen. "Ahh, the denials of those who are young and in love. Those things get me nostalgic every time."

I'm blushing more than a goddamned *shoujo* manga heroine has a right to, which is silly and confusing and I really need to stop being a weird person who thinks strange things about guys he befriends, *stat*. "You must know him well, Haru."

"Hmm. How so?"

"Well, you didn't mind him calling us 'boyfriends', earlier."

"Should I?"

"Hm...huh?" Haru's words were said clearly enough, but they shocked me so much I actually had to stop. Stop thinking, moving, and maybe, if only for a moment, stop *breathing*.

See, it doesn't matter whether or not I like him - I do, I really, really do - or whether or not he reminds me of the Haruka I once knew in my childhood, what matters is that this is far *too much* things to be feeling in far *too soon*.

"I said *should I mind*," Haru repeats, looking straight at me this time, "being called *your boyfriend*."

Yes he should, he *really* should, but then sometimes he looks at me like that and he uses that voice and it makes my throat dry, makes me *hope* and we've known each other for just a handful of months now, I just want to be his friend. I don't want to be so presumptuous as to ask for anything more.

That's what I have to keep telling myself, if I want to last through this day.

"N-no?" I say, smiling at him again in the hopes that he doesn't notice the quiver in my voice. "I mean, technically, you *are* a boy, and you *are* my friend -"

Haru's cheeks are pink, and he's got his mouth poised to say something - probably something along the lines of '*don't be silly, Makoto*', but I don't get to hear whatever it is that comes up next, because the chef goes up to us with steaming dishes.

He starts devouring his mackerel bowl in earnest, and I seriously have better things to do than being abnormally distracted at how gracefully his hands grip the chopsticks, just like he had his paintbrushes, just like he had my own hand, earlier.

If only he wouldn't think I was a complete and utter lunatic, and if only I wouldn't be wasting food, I would have smashed my head into the steaming plate of curry right now. Really, I think it'd be an improvement on my current mental state.

"You never really did answer my question," Haru asks after finishing the bowl with graceful moves of his chopsticks, while I continued shoveling curry into my mouth like a damned madman. I had thought that, hopefully, had I kept myself busy with eating, I wouldn't be called upon to talk. I was apparently wrong. "Do you really not want to tell me?"

My heart is beating madly in my chest as I squeeze my eyes shut and hope he isn't talking about the *question* I'm thinking about. "Sorry, I lost track. What question was it again?"

"Be grateful it's your day off, because I don't want to have to know that there is a teacher as scatterbrained as you on the job," Haru deadpans, setting down his chopsticks on their stand. "I was talking about *the ocean*."

"Well – well, then." 'The ocean' is dangerous waters for me – *literally* – but compared to my dangerous feelings for my new friend, the ocean is actually *safer* for me to talk about, for once. "It's really not something you should be interested in."

Haru rests his head on his clasped hands, and I really shouldn't be thinking of how nice his eyes look when he's intent, but here I am already thinking about it. "Try me," he says, raising an eyebrow.

So I sigh, lay down my spoon, and tell him everything.

Well, not precisely *everything* – but I do tell him about the old fisherman, and how he gave me goldfish, and how the goldfish also died, soon after that storm took him away. I tell him about *Haruka Nanase* – childhood friend Haru, swimmer Haru, who *also* loved water and mackerel and drawing – and how he almost drowned attempting to retrieve Aki-chan's scarf. I tell him about how my hands had shook, and how my vision had darkened, and how I had to wait for Rin to leave before crying like an actual infant.

I don't tell him about Haru leaving on a ferry going God-knows-where, how I had heard news of him crossing oceans and growing up believing the ocean had taken him away from me, for good.

Because then I'd have to tell him, I'd have to tell *this* Haruka – painter Haru, snarky Haru, the Haru who's sitting in front of me *right now*, bright blue eyes soft and intent – I'd have to tell him that when I first saw him, in front of that big, blue ocean, I'd been so happy because all I could think of was that *the ocean brought you back to me*.

And that wouldn't be fair to either of them at all.

Chapter End Notes

EDIT 10/31/2013: Split the original 6k++ word chapter 2 into two chapters, in order to achieve the cliffhanger I was aiming for. I really do hope none of you would mind...if you do, though, I really am sorry.

I don't know if I'll be able to write it in, so I'll say this here: I am having Haru's anterograde amnesia stem from some off-screen event of underwater diving, which seems to be the most in-character way of having him have hypoxia, which is, in turn, the most in-character way of making him have said amnesia, which can be attained through damage of the hippocampus.

Kudos, bookmarks, comments, and the like are very much loved and appreciated, btw. I was so surprised by the sheer amount of people who wanted to read Chapter 1 – recently, my writing of this AU has veered slowly and surely to a less angsty route, but I still hope you like it! And I also hope you may enjoy reading this until the end!

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

In this chapter: Haruka and Makoto continue their date, or they would have if only a couple of old friends didn't decide to visit, and the story moves slowly but surely to its conclusion.

Chapter Notes

For Rei's POV of this chapter, check out [chapter five](#) and [chapter six](#) of *The Materiality Principle*.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

After having lunch, Haru takes my hand again. This time, I try very hard not to blush. I hope I've managed to succeed, and I think I have, because when Haru looks at me he doesn't seem to think I'm a weirdo.

“‘S there anywhere you want to go?”

“Nowhere in particular, Haru.” I reply, smiling back. Haru's hand is so *warm* against mine and I know I said I wasn't going to start thinking weird things again, but it feels nice and I can't help thinking of what Haru said, some while ago – because I've always felt like there was something missing, but right here, right now, I feel just *fine*.

“Hmm. The ocean's out of the running for now, so let's go to the park instead.”

“But don't you want to go to the ocean?” I ask, as he continues half-dragging me to the said park. “You told me yourself, remember: *‘I don't like the park. Too much people, too little water.’*”

“I'll have enough time for the ocean, tomorrow and the days after that.” he says, uncharacteristically blasé. “But right now, I'm spending time with *you*, and you happen to have less free time than the ocean.”

See, the more he keeps saying things like this, the more I shouldn't be expected to hold the reins on these embarrassing feelings. “Well, it's not as if I can have the ocean's boundless resources, you know. It's just...*there*.”

“And you're not, which makes this day even more important.” Haru says, and how is it that he manages to sound so earnest without even changing his tone of voice at all?

How is it that the more my brain says I shouldn't, the more my heart keeps on telling me I should?

Damn, if I ever get left alone with my thoughts any more than I already have been, I just might turn into an actual *shoujo* manga heroine, or one of those method actors.

Or...or *Rei*.

Haru's eyes are downcast as he shoves a half-loaf of bread my direction. "Let's feed the ducks." He then turns around to chuck bread chunks at the ducks swimming in the pond, as serious as he was with his paintings and his mackerel.

He was as serious as he was, really, when he had been asking me if he should *mind* being called my boyfriend.

We're both silent as we chuck chunks of bread to the ducks below with differing amounts of force. Or at least we are, until Haru sneezes.

"Bless you." I say, handing him a tissue. "Take it, Haru."

"...thanks." he mumbles, sniffing. "Why do you call me 'Haru'?"

My hands pause on the bread as I realize: I've not only been thinking of him as 'Haru', I've been *calling* him 'Haru' the entire time, as well. Didn't I tell myself I wasn't going to call him that, for 'various reasons'? "...oh, sorry, would you like me to call you 'Haruka' again, instead? Because I will, if you want."

"No, don't." Haruka replies, though his voice is so soft I wouldn't have heard him had I not been so nervous and hyperaware. "...when you call me 'Haru'...I like it."

When we were in high school, Rei used to have this banner that hung over his bed that read *carpe diem* in big block letters. *Seize the day*; and it was in Latin because that was the traditional way and Rei was nothing if not a traditionalist. If I were to properly seize the day, I would do something about this.

Maybe I could just *ask* him?

Then if Haru didn't want to reciprocate my feelings, I could tell him to forget about it and just spend the rest of our time being his friend. If he doesn't want to like me back, he won't write about it, which means he won't even remember it in the first place.

Call me selfish, or cowardly, but I'm *human* and find it a relief that for once, Haru's weird brand of amnesia finally makes some modicum of sense.

"I never did tell you what was wrong with me," Haru begins, and chucks another bread chunk rather forcefully. It's a miracle the ducks don't get hurt, really.

"There's *nothing* wrong with you, Haru." I say, carefully, because if I don't take care of what I'm saying I just might let it slip that I think there's nothing wrong with him, because I think he's *perfect*. More awkwardness would only ensue.

"All right, then I never did tell you about my '*condition*'." Haru actually sets down the torn-off loaf to make air quotes, and I chuckle as I continue flinging bread chunks from my own half. "I'm assuming you watched enough of your sister's dramas to know about amnesia."

"Yes, but don't you start, Haru, it's a perfectly *normal* brother-sister bonding activity --"

"I wasn't judging, Makoto, I was only *saying*." There it is again, that Look of his that could only be interpreted to mean '*Makoto, stop being a dummy*'. I haven't seen much of that in a while. "You were genre-savvy enough to offer me a notebook, remember?"

"Oh, right, I almost forgot: I've got more blank ones to spare if you want them."

“You don’t have to –” Haru starts, then stops, and then turns his eyes downward again. “– But I would appreciate that. Thanks.”

“You’re always welcome.”

“Makoto – have you heard of something called anterograde amnesia?”

The way he pronounces ‘anterograde’ is flawless, he probably studied some English abroad, if you were to ask me; but the word sounds so *graceless*, so unfitting of even being spoken by someone as naturally graceful as Haru.

...seriously though, did someone replace my thought processes with Rei’s while I wasn’t looking?

If so, then I hope Haru’s already home by the time I start ranting about the psychological benefits of wearing purple butterfly-print socks to work.

“No,” I reply. “I haven’t heard of that before...I’m pretty sure I’d have remembered if I had.”

“It’s a fancy term for short-term memory loss.” Haru’s run out of bread to throw long ago, and now he’s leaning on the pond railing, watching the bread chunks I tossed as they get divvied up by the ducks below. “It basically means I can’t make new memories.”

I continue throwing bread chunks, if only to further conceal how much my heart sinks. I had guessed long ago that he had probably had amnesia of that sort – not that I knew exactly what it was called – and there was no other reason for me to explain his jittery unfamiliarity from each day to the next, but I had hoped that I was wrong. Hearing Haru lay it all out in plain words – *I can’t make new memories* – makes it sound even worse.

“It’s why I can’t remember studying or travelling or what I had for lunch yesterday, but I know how to paint and cook mackerel and speak languages. It’s why I don’t remember the names of my childhood friends, but I know how to swim.” He continues on, perfectly toneless, until he swallows something down and turns to look at me.

Haru’s eyebrows are crossed, minutely, and his eyes are intense as they look at me. It’s hard for me to look away, but following a gut feeling I look down, and sure enough, both his hands are curled into fists.

“It’s why I can’t remember your job or your favourite coffee if I don’t write it down, but I *know* that as long as you’re around, *I don’t feel so incomplete anymore.*”

He looks at me with so much intensity, with so much faith and brightness and other things I can’t possibly dare to name, and I can’t help but smile back because it’s *Haru*, and he doesn’t really leave much room for alternate interpretations.

So I guess *now’s* the time, then.

“Haru, oh goodness, *Haru* –” I start saying, eyes widening like the *shoujo* heroine I was apparently meant to become.

“Makoto, the truth is, I –”

“Mako-chan, Mako-chan’s friend, *hello!*” pipes in a familiar – *too* familiar – voice, and all the words Haru and I could’ve said are forgotten as we look around to see him. Nagisa’s almost as tall as me, now, and one arm of his is wrapped around one of Rei’s as he drags his roommate our direction.

There's a sunny smile on Nagisa's face, and I would be a selfish friend for wanting to shake him by the shoulders for a good hour, but right now, I do, I really do.

"*Timing*, Nagisa," I mumble under my breath, hoping nobody could hear, but Haru obviously does, because a corner of his mouth curls up into the smallest of smiles.

Well, at least I got *some* good out of it.

"Your name is 'Haruka'?" Nagisa asks him, swinging his legs on the swing set, waving around the ice cream cone in his hand. "That's pretty girly."

Haru is silent as he stays on his side of the swing. But Rei stops from pushing Nagisa on the swing to fix him with a Look that, by and large, remains unnoticed by our bluntly honest friend. "Nagisa-kun, that's not a nice thing to say." Ever the diplomat, he turns to Haru and says, "I'm really sorry for that, Mister –"

Haru flinches, just as he always had when prompted for his last name. It suddenly occurs to me that we've been friends for months now, and have been in this...whatever-*this*-is for a good twenty minutes now, but I still don't know his last name. Surely it isn't one of the many things he'd have unconsciously forgotten? "Just 'Haruka' would be fine."

"Then let me say that you are free to disregard anything else this little rascal says, Haruka-san." Rei says, pushing Nagisa with considerably more force than usual.

"Stop calling me a 'little rascal', Rei-chan." Nagisa groans. "Besides, I'm not 'little' anymore, I'm *taller* than you!"

"I'll stop calling you a little rascal, when you finally stop *acting* like one." Rei says, clicking his tongue in annoyance. "And you're only taller by *one centimeter*." he grunts. Nagisa grins like a fox, and reaches back in an attempt to muss Rei's perfectly-coiffed hair. He succeeds.

When I look at them now, it's hard to believe that the first time they met, Rei had filed a complaint because Nagisa was this guy who kept watching him practice his pole vaulting, and Rei wanted him to stop. Not exactly high-school-BFF, university-roommate, yuppie-bromance material.

I'm leaning against the swing set frame, watching the three of them on the swings. When Nagisa and Rei graduated from university they had both invited me to move in with them, in the three-bedroom Tokyo apartment Nagisa loved – but, looking at them then, and looking at them now, it was plain for me to see the reason why I declined. Between those two and their unnatural closeness, I'd only be getting in the way...

"Makoto," Haru says, standing up from his swing seat to look at me. "Sit down."

"No, but Haru, I'm fine, you really don't have to..."

"He doesn't *have* to, but he *wants* to, Mako-chan. I keep telling you there's a difference." Nagisa drawls, as he intentionally digs his heels in the sand. Rei makes this irritated little noise in reply, and Nagisa laughs. "Get on with it, you two."

I look at Haru – he's as poker-faced as ever, a full one-eighty from his intense look earlier, and I guess it's just my luck he is because I don't think I want *both* Nagisa *and* Rei to see me acting like a complete goofball. "Tell me if it gets difficult for you."

Haru rolls his eyes as I sit down. “You’re not *that* heavy.”

“You say the nicest things, Haru.” I say, and as Haru pushes me back and forth I diligently try my best to avoid looking at Nagisa – because, sure enough, he’s gonna be wearing that damned shit-eating grin he always wore when he knew something we all didn’t. It’s one of the bad habits neither I nor Rei had gotten him to grow out of.

“Say, Haru-chan.”

Haru’s hands tense up where they were on the chains above me, and when he speaks there is a tension to his voice that I want so much to dispel.

“Please don’t use ‘-chan’ with my name.” he snaps, and then *I* tense up too, because it’s all too damned familiar: it was something *Haruka Nanase* would say. Something he *used* to say.

By now I’ve thus concluded that the universe really *is* playing a big cosmic joke on me, and it’s cruel and mad and *unfair*. Why is it that just when I finally feel complete I just *have* to be reminded that I’m wrong, and there really is still something missing?

“...*right*.” Nagisa says, nonchalantly, as if he hasn’t heard that line before. “How’d you meet Mako-chan?”

“I was painting, he passed by, and he was saying weird things.” Haru replies. And I’m...impressed, really, because I gave him the notepad one month into knowing him and...and if he still vaguely remembers how we first met, then maybe...maybe our situation would not be that dire.

Maybe he still could make new memories, I think, and before I can even think to take that thought back, the corners of my mouth are already turning up into a smile.

“Really?? Mako-chan was ‘saying weird things’?” Nagisa parrots, mimicking Haru’s last words and the cadence and rhythm in which he had spoken. As expected from a prodigy voice actor. Then he looks at me and says, far too dramatically: “Mako-chan, could it be that staying in here for too long...*has turned you into a weirdo?*”

Rei’s about to open his mouth to say something, but instead of continuing he groans and presses the palm of his hand to his forehead. We could never really understand how Nagisa’s logic worked.

“Hey, don’t you start, Nagisa – this is *your* hometown too, lest you forget.” I chide, accusingly pointing a finger my friend’s way. “And I am *not* a weirdo.”

“But the Mako-chan we know doesn’t talk to himself, yanno.” Nagisa sing-songs, eyes closed and grin wicked; I knew I really shouldn’t trust that smile. “Neither does he grin like *that* for nothing. So that means I’m right, and you really should’ve gone with us to Tokyo.”

“Hadn’t it ever crossed your mind, Nagisa-kun,” Rei starts, carefully, “That maybe Makoto-senpai would have his own reasons for not wanting to leave Iwatobi?”

“Ehh? But what could it be?” Nagisa cries, but for some reason I can’t explain I have the feeling he’s only putting on a show. He’s a smart young man; I’ve never seen him be as clueless as he claims to be. “I mean, *you’re* in Tokyo, *I’m* in Tokyo, the twins are *busy* at school...pray tell, Rei-chan, what other reason *could* there be?”

Subtlety is one of Rei’s strong points, but I don’t think I could miss the sweeping, pointed look he throws Haru and I. Then he looks back at Nagisa, eyebrow raised, as if to say ‘*so there*’.

My cheeks are burning up, and I don't think I want to look at Haru, not even to see what he thinks of the ridiculousness of it all. So instead I swallow the highly-unanticipated, seemingly-prophetic sinking feeling in my gut, and grin back.

"Ah, okay." Nagisa says, simply, and throws me another one of those knowing smirks. "I get it!"

Soon after, Nagisa and Rei are lost in their own world of childish bickering – something about idol singers, and financial statements? – so I decide to push my luck and hazard a glance back at Haru.

Only to feel my cheeks burn hotter than they ever had before, because he's just *standing there*, looking back at me with that same intense gaze he had, *earlier*.

I must have really been turned into a hundred-eighty-three-cm tall *shoujo* manga heroine, then, because when reminded of what he had said earlier my cheeks only feel hotter.

Here's the thing about love, ladies and gentlemen – it's a pain in the neck, is what it is.

"Are you okay, Makoto?" Haru asks, and I really must look like such a lovesick fool if *Haru's* asking me if I'm okay.

"Mm, no, I'm fine." I say, smiling back in the hope that he won't catch me lying. It's a defense mechanism, always has been.

...and apparently it works on Haru, because when he gestures for me to look forward, there's a slight smattering of pink dusting his cheeks.

"There's still something I have to tell you, though." he mumbles, and had I not been so focused on his voice I wouldn't have heard it.

"Well, I *also* have something to tell you, Haru." I say in return, closing my eyes, allowing myself to wallow in the warm fuzzy feelings I had felt when Haru said *I don't feel so incomplete anymore*. Are there even words I could say that would make Haru even *half* as happy as he had made me? "I'm so sorry about my friends, though...they're good guys, really, but not exactly fond of reading the atmosphere."

"I think you've got that wrong."

"Huh?"

"They *do* read the atmosphere. I mean...your friend with the glasses, Ryugazaki, he obviously gets it. And I think Nagisa does too."

"Wait." There's something a bit off about that sentence. "Haru, since when did you call Nagisa by his *name*?"

"Since you always kept calling him that, when you were talking about him." Haru replies smoothly, and he's a twinge offended now, that I can't help but feel guilty. It really isn't his fault he reminds me too much of my childhood friend. "I wrote it down. You never really did tell me his last name."

"...sorry." I murmur sheepishly. When he lays it all down like that, everything makes perfect sense and I don't know how I haven't seen it before. "Really, Haru, I'm sorry."

“Makoto doesn’t have to apologize,” Haru replies, tone shifting to the fond edge of the spectrum. “You’ve done nothing wrong.”

I swallow down my protests because yes, *I have* done something wrong, I really have, but I don’t think an abandoned swing set is the best place to discuss confusing, conflicting emotions with the guy who *just might be* my boyfriend. “We *really* need to talk, though.”

“Later, then.” he says, and I should be panicking by now but his voice is firm and strong and – and with his hands on my shoulders, I feel we can go through *anything*.

I know wishy-washiness has always been one of my weak points, but *for once* I want to believe that we just might make this through.

We’re on our way home when he reaches out to hold my hand.

“Makoto.”

“Haru...?”

“Is this okay?” he asks me, and I don’t know what *this* he’s referring to – this unspoken relationship, this hand-holding, this lack of a proper confession? – but he sounds so worried, so damned *unsure*, that there really is nothing else for me to do, then, but smile at him and say *yes*.

But it’s *not* okay, it won’t be until I lay it all out for him to see, so I bite my lips, grip his hand tighter, and speak.

“Earlier, I said I had something to tell you.”

“Well, go on then.” Haru replies, and it reminds me so much of *the first time we met* that I almost don’t want to carry on.

“When...when you said those stuff earlier, that you don’t always remember me, but you know that you’re complete when I’m with you...it made me really happy, Haru.” I say, somehow managing to stumble over the little words, and look at him. They say eyes are the window to the soul, and I wish he can see how much I want him to *understand*. “Before anything else, I need you to know that, Haru.”

Haru doesn’t say anything in return, only nods, and squeezes my hand tighter. At this point, it’s a miracle the neighborhood doesn’t hear my heart beating like a goddamned marching band.

“You know about my childhood friend, right?”

“Yes, of course.” Haru says, his grip on my hand still tight. Maybe he rolls his eyes, maybe he grimaces; either way I can’t be so sure, because I can’t bear to look at him.

“When I met you, I was too preoccupied with giving a good first impression, that I didn’t quite get it at first.” I confess, looking down at my shoes as they hit the pavement. “But as we begun spending more time together, it hit me. The reason why I had felt so *comfortable* with you – it was because, between the water obsession and the painting, you reminded me so much of *him*. Of *Haruka Nanase*.”

Haru stops walking, then, but he still isn’t letting go of my hand. I look at him, and his eyes are still

downcast, and his mouth still pulled taut into a thin line. Of course, I should've expected that reaction. Doesn't mean I'd enjoy seeing it.

"That wasn't at all fair for either of you, and I *know* that." I continue, knowing full well that my palms are getting sweaty and my words don't seem to be going anywhere. "So I had to remind myself each and every day, to look at you not as a reminder of my childhood, but as *your own person*, because I really *do* like you, and I really *do* want to be your friend. But the more I did that _"

I suck in one long breath, and the words just can't help but keep on going.

"– the more I looked at you, *really* looked at you, the more I saw that you were *funny* and *kind* and *absolutely perfect* and I tried so hard not to, because it'd be weird and you most probably won't accept, but I can't stop it so I'm here right now, and I still like you, so much. I like you *so much* that it's embarrassing, that I just want to curl up in a ball and *hide* because it's scary and I've never quite felt like this before. But I still miss Haru, I still miss my childhood friend so much that sometimes I find it hard to breathe...and sometimes when I look at you I can't help but see someone else, someone I know you aren't, and it *kills* me because I may have liked Haru, but right now, I like *you* and I don't ever want you to think you're not good enough or anything stupid like that, because you *are* and *I'm* the stupid one."

"Makoto." Haru says, reaching out with his free hand to dab at the corners of my eyes. I never really knew when I had started *crying*. God, I'm a total wreck. "Makoto, it's all right."

"But it isn't, and I didn't make any sense, did I?"

"You made sense *to me*." Haru says, looking at me with those serious blue eyes of his. "And just in case it wasn't obvious *already*: *I love you*, Makoto. I appreciate you being here for me."

I scrub off some of the tears with my free hand, and I know our interlocked hands are sweaty and gross right now but I just don't *ever* want to let go. "Thank you, Haru. I know I don't deserve it, I don't deserve *any* of it, but – oh, but I'm so selfish, and I'm just so damned *happy*."

"For someone so smart, you can be *so wrong* on the simplest of things." Haru murmurs, looking at me and – is that just my blurry vision speaking, or are his eyes shining? It reminds me of the ocean, and for once, I don't seem so scared anymore.

"You're the most selfless person I know," he tells me, "And you stayed with me even if I forget you each and every day, and I'm not a good person *at all* but you like me and if anything, *I'm* the selfish one for being happy about it, because I know that when I say what I need to tell you, I *can't* have the right to even be your *friend* anymore."

I take my earlier words back, then – now I'm *still* crying, and Haru looks like he just might follow suit, so yeah, I guess I'm scared again. "Why?"

"Because my name is Haruka *Nanase*." he says, clearly, firmly, and everything around us suddenly grinds to a halt. "And *I remember you*."

Chapter End Notes

Just a little note: had this been in Japanese (which it thankfully isn't), Makoto would

have been saying *daisuki*. Haru would have been saying *aishiteru*, because he knows that he shouldn't mince words.

Yes, I did just split chapter 2 in two chapters, because chapter 2 had just enough words to fuel two chapters, but the chapter 3 I was writing didn't have enough 'meat' in it, so to speak, to fuel one measly chapter. So, I'm saying my apologies, if my doing this has confused you...

There were supposed to be more notes to supplement this chapter, but I'm sorry, I think that this chapter 3 really does have a lot of gaping holes in it that can only be explained by chapter 4. I'll give you a hint as to why most of this chapter doesn't seem to make sense – it's because we're looking at this from Makoto's POV. And if that hint doesn't seem to make sense, either, I have nothing else to offer you but my apologies.

And yes, the next chapter really is the finale. Wish me luck, guys!

[Have a preview for chapter 4.](#)

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

In this chapter: one day, Haruka Nanase wakes up and is faced with a couple of uninvited visitors...but what does this all have to do with the best friend he once left behind in Iwatobi?

Chapter Notes

For Rei's POV of this chapter, please take a look at [chapter 7 of *The Materiality Principle*](#)!

We've also got fanart for this now, please take a look, it's BEAUTIFUL!!! (The line is from this chapter, but it may be meant more as an epilogue? Either way, BEAUTIFUL.) [Thanks a lot, nunupapyrus!](#)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

*...my name is Haruka Nanase. And **I remember you.***

In the end, it doesn't matter what I did or didn't do.

After all, either way, I won't remember this in the morning.

The last thing I remember is sinking below sea level, and how all I had thought had been *why did I go here, Makoto would never find me here.*

I know it's a useless thing to worry about, because ever since I was brought out of Iwatobi, I've never heard from him again. Granted, my parents were never forthcoming with giving out our contact details to anybody, so yeah, I guess I really should've seen it coming. Granted, I also never was one for new technologies like mobile phones and the Internet - what use would I have for them, if Makoto wasn't there to teach me? So I definitely should've thought that yeah, *of course* Makoto wouldn't be able to find me, even if he wanted to.

But even though I've always known all of this, I still childishly believed that no matter where I went, or how much I've lost of myself, he would always be able to find me.

When my parents thought to bring me along, they probably thought I was going to have fun - and to be honest, I think that's also what I believed. But contrary to all our expectations I didn't find anything to enjoy out of it - all those years passed by in a blur of school work, of people I don't remember, of breaking into pools and staring into nothingness because the only person who would

pull me back to reality is halfway around the world.

Sometime in between I got to catch up with Rin in Australia, but though he had been happy about it, I...wasn't. He was fine and all, beyond excited to regale me of tales on how he exceeded everyone's expectations and was now his school's star swimmer, and I was happy for him because he's my friend but I wasn't happy at all because he wasn't what I was looking for.

Rin's a better friend to me than I was to him, though, because on that visit he gave me Makoto's e-mail address. Said something about how seeing the two of us apart was like seeing an pause in the earth's revolution, or something fancy like that. I told him I'd contact Makoto myself, he didn't have to do me a favor or whatever, like the over-helpful nosy nag Rin aspires to be.

What I didn't tell him, however, was that I had no intention of ever doing that.

How could I have the nerve to contact Makoto, anyway, when the last time I had seen him, I had made him cry?

Makoto's a very good friend, he really is. So the whole time we were on the platform, he had been smiling and calm as per usual, fussing over my hair as we waited for our train. It was as if our lives weren't going to change for good, so I had squared my jaw and assumed an emotionless expression – just like I usually had, many times before.

He had been waiting until I boarded the train, until the train doors had closed and the train had moved away from the platform. He probably thought I wouldn't look back, but I did and that's when I saw him - he cried harder than he had when the old fisherman had died, harder than Rin had said when I drowned, and once again it was all because of me. And I hate myself for it - hate how I had been the reason for him to fall apart.

If I had to be completely honest with myself, I had wanted to hug Makoto, back then, at the train station.

But then it would have been worse, because had I done that, I know that I would have never let him go.

The worst thing about waking up is that I'm rudely reminded that somehow, I'm still alive, and then I have to work out how I went from drowning in the Atlantic Ocean to waking up in an apartment.

I don't remember the other times I've woken up ever since then, though, so I *might* be wrong, but - but judging from the dull ache in my head as I flip through my haphazardly-organized notes, it definitely *isn't* my favourite thing to do.

Of course I still remember what my favourite thing to do is - swimming, obvious - but...

...from the looks of it I can't even do that anymore. Somewhere in my notes, someone had wrote *the water almost took you from us, so don't you dare swim again, Haruka*...probably my mother, since she's the only one who calls me by my first name in Japanese anymore, anyway.

Everyone else calls me Nanase, except for the old man down the street who makes amazing mackerel...or at least that's what I've written down. Maybe I'll have to go there later, to confirm...

There's a little lime-green, spiral-bound notepad on my bedside table, though. The color is so

jarringly *other* from all my other stuff, that it probably should've been the first thing I've noticed.

As I flip through the pages, I feel my heart beat wildly in my chest as I see the first characters on the first page, written in clean black ink. *Makoto Tachibana*.

Not my own handwriting, but awfully familiar.

The next things written, however, are in my own handwriting: *elementary teacher, coffee fanatic, doesn't like ghost stories*. It's probably a different person altogether, well, Tachibana sort of is a common surname....but could it be? Had I already found him? As I ponder this, my heart continues beating so briskly, my mind subconsciously begins crafting worst-case scenarios of cardiac arrest.

So yeah, I read up on this Makoto, who could be the same Makoto Tachibana I regretted leaving behind, who could also be considered the reason for my dangerous quick heartbeat.

Somewhere in the middle of reading “*doesn't want to see me overworking myself*” and “*wants me to meet his younger siblings*”, I've begun to smile. I know it's out of character - I've been called a robot in many different languages and situations, for 'not smiling'. But I can't help it - it seems that this is the effect that Makoto Tachibana has on me.

It won't be much of a stretch, then, for me to say that I might like this person; might be *in love* with him, even.

Just as I am about to think about the complications this would bring, however, someone knocks on my door.

The guy behind the door has dark hair, red-framed glasses, and eyes so bright they almost look purple. He's frowning, obviously not pleased with being here, and definitely not somebody I remember knowing.

...I'm pretty sure I can take him in a fistfight.

“Mister Haruka *Nanase*?” the guy asks, and crosses his arms. His very *muscular* arms. Guess I'd have to rethink my earlier assumption.

“That's what's written on the door, yes.” I say, ready to deny and obfuscate if possible. Say what you will about athletes and men in general, but the truth is I'm a long-retired swimmer and someone who really has no business getting into fist fights with taller, stronger men.

Said man moves to adjust his glasses, the light hitting the lenses in a way that makes him look absolutely *menacing*. I swallow, and all I can think of right now is that I want to live today, so very much. “Very well. We *shall* have a word with you, Mister Nanase -”

“- Don't *scare* him, Rei-chan, you're doing it *all wrong*.” drawls another man. This man - who seems to have appeared out of nowhere, judging from the startled noise the first man makes when the other man drapes his arms around the dark-haired man's neck - has soft blond hair, bright eyes, and a frame even larger than that of his companion's. I take a step back, instinctively.

Just my luck. *More* visitors.

“I was not scaring him, I was merely being...persuasive.”

“Well, then you should know that people 'get persuaded' by you, because they're *scared*, you dummy.” The blond man chides him, smirking. Just as I've regained half a mind to slam the door on them and leave them to their bickering, though, the blond man turns to me. From this angle, his eyes almost look a bright fuschia pink. “It's been a while, Haru-chan.”

The blond hair and pink eyes weren't apparently enough to jog my memory, but I can only remember one person with this indiscriminate use of cutesy nicknames... “*Nagisa?*”

“Oh, so you *do* remember me!” Nagisa squeals, an act totally at odds with his general largeness. When we were little, Rin had goaded me into a bet as to whether or not Nagisa would grow to be taller than us. Guess he owes me now, then. “Can we come inside, Haru-chan? I'll make sure Rei-chan doesn't scare you anymore, I promise.”

“...do as you wish.” I say, turning my back on them as I make my way back to the kitchen. As much as it would be gratifying for me to grill three servings of mackerel and eat them all myself, there is still a thing called *common decency* that I have to adhere to. It is eight in the morning, after all, and they *did* come to visit. “Do you want mackerel?”

The dark-haired man – *Rei*, I think was what Nagisa called him earlier - hurriedly shakes his head. “No, thank you.”

“...still a bad memory, huh.” Nagisa says, grinning. Rei shudders. Must be some kind of inside joke I shouldn't butt into.

“More for me, then.” I say, retreating back into the kitchen.

“I introduced myself to you yesterday, but in this case I am aware that I should do so again.” Rei says, as I turn away. Guess he doesn't wanna see my face as he speaks - good, that makes two of us. “Rei Ryugazaki. Makoto-senpai's a *good friend*.”

I'm not supposed to bristle at the younger man's tone, but what the hell, I do anyway. “What's that supposed to mean?”

“It means that Rei-chan has a massive soft spot for Mako-chan, so much so that Rei-chan wants to be the one giving you the obligatory '*if you hurt him I will cut you*' speech. He's a big stickler for standard procedure!” Nagisa replies, and Ryugazaki clicks his tongue, once, in annoyance. “But I guess we can agree that there's nothing 'standard' about you and Mako-chan.”

“I don't know what you mean.”

“That's the *point*, Haru-chan!” Nagisa exclaims, putting his hands together, as he leans in. “That's why I'm here to help you.”

So after the mackerel is done grilling, Nagisa sits me down and tells me everything. I'm pretty sure he's added a fair amount of bells-and-whistles to the retelling - my voice can't possibly sound like that, for one - but it's better than knowing *nothing*.

“And when we got back from the vending machines, Mako-chan was looking at me like this, as if he was thinking: '*where did you take my Haruka and what did you do to him*', he was so scary. He was in Orca mode all over again; I hadn't seen that in *years*.”

“I don't think Makoto sounds like that, Nagisa.” I say, even if I know I don't have the memories to prove the accuracy of my expectations. What *does* Makoto sound like, after all these years? Even if, like they said, I was just with him yesterday - I can't remember anything, which is more than a little frustrating.

“No, Haru-chan, he *so* totally sounds that cool and mature - hey, Rei-chan, back me up here.”

“Makoto-senpai *does* sound cool and mature; only...Nagisa-kun, are we even working off of the same definitions of those words??”

“Boo. You're both no fun.” Nagisa says as he pouts, and spears his last piece of mackerel with a fork. He swallows it down, and then throws up his arms in defeat. “That's all I know, though. Whatever happened next between you and Mako-chan?”

I look away from Nagisa's questioning expression, moving my head to the side and cursing why there are no windows I can pretend to look out of in this damned apartment. “I already told you. *I don't know.*”

“Well, whatever you did, Nanase-san, you most probably did it *wrong.*” Ryugazaki tells me, pushing up the frames of his glasses with one hand. “Because when we last saw him, Makoto-senpai wasn't happy. When Nagisa-kun told me what you were going to do, I thought he'd be, and right now he *isn't*, and so *you* have to *fix it.*”

“Easy, Rei-chan, *easy.*” Nagisa tells his friend, a hand pressed to the other man's chest, as if he was - restraining him, most probably stopping him from reaching over to grab me by the collar. Guess Nagisa wasn't exaggerating when he said that Ryugazaki had a soft spot for Makoto. If the Makoto he knew was at least *half* as kind as the Makoto I remembered growing up with, I can't blame him. “It's not Haru-chan's fault, you understand that, right?”

I'm about to open my mouth, saying something about how it really *is* my fault – because really, the amnesia could've been avoided had I not thought it a brilliant idea to explore the deep blue sea without bringing the necessary oxygen tank. But Ryugazaki beats me to it, swatting away Nagisa's restraining hands and settling for crossing his arms over his chest.

“I'm not talking about the amnesia; of course I won't be so *daft* as to berate him for something he *obviously* cannot control.” he says, pursing his lips in annoyance. “But if we were to put focus on the things he *does* have control over – if Nanase-san remembers everything before the incident, and he remembers regretting not keeping in touch with Makoto-senpai, then why didn't he just, I don't know, *keep in touch with Makoto-senpai?*”

The apartment grows dead silent. This would normally be comforting for me, but right now it isn't – as Ryugazaki's bespectacled eyes glare daggers into me I swallow down a sudden rush of emotion. Of course, why didn't I just throw all caution to the wind and send...something, *anything.* In our childhood my moods were randomized enough that I doubt he'd think I was being intentionally evasive.

The problem is, however – what would I have said? Little words like ‘*hello*’ or clichés like ‘*how do you do*’? Lies like ‘*I'm okay*’? Or maybe the truth, like ‘*I wish you were here*’ or ‘*hey there Makoto, I missed you some years ago so I decided to drown myself, and I can't remember new stuff anymore*’?

Nagisa speaks, his bright tone completely at odds with his worried expression. Said expression seems out-of-place on his usually-happy face, and I decide firmly that I don't like it. “But Rei-chan, Haru-chan was *abroad*, and you know it's not that easy –”

“It *is* that easy!” Ryugazaki almost *shouts*, the palm of his hand hitting the table, sending tableware rattling. I look at him warily, wondering how a guy I don't know could be so emotionally invested in the things I should've done. “What use would we have for technology, pray *tell*, if it wasn't to be used in these very kinds of situations –”

“– but Rei-chan,”

Ryugazaki turns to glare at me again, and I am suddenly reminded of the English idiom: *if looks could kill*. If they could, I would’ve probably been dead twice over, judging by the intensity of his glares. “Makoto-senpai can smile and laugh and deny all he wants, but there’s no hiding how sad he was – how sad he *still* is – every time he talked about *you*, Nanase-san. He felt *horrible* without you.”

“Ryugazaki,” I say, slowly, carefully, willing myself to not let my voice crack with emotion. “Right now, you’re telling me that Makoto isn’t happy, and it’s because of me. Am I correct?”

“Yes.”

“Now, Haru-chan –”

“Well, the last memory I will always have of Makoto was that he wasn’t happy, and it was all because of *me*.” I say, cutting off whatever it is Nagisa would’ve said. “You can see a pattern, right – so why would I even *dare* to keep in touch, when all I can do is make Makoto unhappy?”

Nagisa is looking at Ryugazaki. Ryugazaki is looking back at Nagisa. They are looking at each other with so much pity that I *know* it’s intended for my benefit, but they just don’t want to look at me.

That’s fine. Right now, I wouldn’t want to look at me, either.

As per usual, Nagisa is the one who speaks first.

“Haru-chan...do you *really* think that?”

“Of course I do,” I say, holding myself tighter so they can’t see me fall apart. Was this what I made Makoto feel, for all those years I’ve forgotten? My urge to stay away grows as I consider this.

Someone who continues making such a good person like Makoto sad shouldn’t have the right to stay here and be selfish.

“Well, let’s just say that you really did make Mako-chan as miserable as Rei-chan just said...” Nagisa says, and throws Ryugazaki a sideways glance. Ryugazaki, for all his frustration, seems to be keeping silent, for now – is it for Nagisa’s sake, or my own? “But...I guess it’s just too bad you can’t remember how Mako-chan looked like, yesterday.”

Nagisa doesn’t wait for me to reply before he continues speaking. “He was so *happy*. I hadn’t seen him smile that nicely since...well, since a very long time ago! And he didn’t even know that you were the Haru-chan he was waiting for all this damned time. I swear on Rei-chan’s butterfly-print pajamas, if that isn’t *true love*, then I dunno what the hell it should be.”

There’s a smile on Nagisa’s face. It’s almost *hopeful* as he looks at me, and I wince. I don’t think I’d like to see myself letting him down.

“See, Mako-chan shouldn’t be hurting so much, yanno, if he didn’t *care* so much in the first place.” Nagisa tells me, carefully, reaching across the table to hold my hand. Despite the tense atmosphere, his eyes still shine brightly. Guess that’s something about him that never really changed. “And a certain someone put it best. When someone cares too much...it’s called *love*, Haru-chan.”

There’s no way I can find out what my face looks like when I look back, but from the looks of it it’s probably something I won’t ever live up to, because Nagisa chuckles softly and reaches over to

pull me into a hug. Or at least he *tries* to – Ryugazaki probably notices the plates still occupying the table before I do, because he’s the one who grabs Nagisa by the collar to pull him back.

Nagisa, perpetually undeterred, only grins wider and crawls along the side of the *kotatsu* to hug me. I’m not particularly fond of touching other people, but Nagisa’s arms are warm and – and I missed Makoto, more than just a lot, almost fatally so, but I missed Nagisa too. So I hold him closer.

“Hey, Rei-chan,” Nagisa says, calling his friend from over my shoulder. “We could be having a *proper* group hug if you joined in.”

“*Tempting*, but I’ll pass.” Ryugazaki says, and it sounds like he’s standing up. “I have places to go to; it would behoove you to remember that, Nagisa-kun.”

“Oh, the business meeting!” Nagisa pipes up as he pulls away from me, only to be met with his friend’s disapproving glare. Ryugazaki seems to be doing a lot of that, lately. “Oops, right. *Secret* business meeting...”

“Irrelevant. I don’t think Nanase-san’s related to our rival corporation, anyway...you really don’t have to come with, Nagisa-kun, I’ll just drop by later.”

“I don’t *have* to, but I *want* to, Rei-chan.” Nagisa replies, and I gulp because it seems like I’ve heard those words before. “And I trust that Haru-chan could fix this. Right, Haru-chan?”

From the looks of what Nagisa had told me, and what Ryugazaki had appended, it seems like I’ve got a lot of things to own up to, but if doing so means I can at least meet Makoto again after what seems to me like *years*...then yeah. Of course I would do it. I nod, once.

“Good! You and Mako-chan better be back to being the super-sweet love birds you were when we last saw you, okay?” Nagisa says as he grins at me, holding out a hand so we could both stand up.

I follow him to the foyer, where Ryugazaki is already fiddling with the laces of his shoes. Nagisa’s shoes, on the other hand, are far simpler – slip-on loafers, and he has them on in seconds. “I’ll see you soon, Haru-chan!”

Ryugazaki stands up sometime after Nagisa skips out my front door, takes two steps forward and lingers, right there in the foyer. His back is turned to me; I look at him, confused.

“Oh, and Nanase-san?”

“What is it?”

“The next time I see Makoto-senpai, he better be smiling.” Ryugazaki reaches up to push up his glasses. He’s not looking at me, but from what I can see, his eyes are bright with the same fierce *emotion* I had seen him show earlier. “Or I will *never forgive you*.”

Chapter End Notes

The biggest note about chapter 4 that relates to chapter 3 is that in between the second to the last and the last parts of ch. 3, there is a missing scene - Nagisa and Haru talk by the vending machine, in a way that would be reminiscent of the Mako-Nagi vending machine talk in Free! ep.9. I dunno if I'll be able to write it, but the gist is that Haru

tells Nagisa he remembers Mako...as a kid. So far, anterograde amnesia doesn't seem to have an effect on memories before the incident.

How Rei acts towards Haru is meant to mirror how he acts towards Rin, in canon ep 11! I do hope I got it right, though, somehow...I find it rather amusing that in this AU, Rei's idolization of Haru in canon is transferred onto Makoto-senpai's Skype buddy Rin (athletic, excels abroad, smart - Nitori did say he was always in the top 10, right?), and his annoyance of Rin in canon is transferred to Makoto-senpai's could-be boyfriend Haru (because why did he leave Mako, what does he want from him??). Otoh, his respect for Makoto-senpai is a goddamned fixed point in a changing age...same with his bromance w/ Nagisa.

I intentionally chose the phrase "brought out of Iwatobi", despite its rather clunky appearance, because Haru didn't *leave* Iwatobi. It was never his choice in the first place.

This note is not particularly chapter-related, but it just needed to be said: See, the thing is, the more I wrote this, the more it felt like an Asian drama, and as I went on I found my tone growing closer to...say Master's Sun, or Princess Hours, which are fluffy comedies with a generous splash of drama, more than the original objective, which was more like some unholy combo of Stairway to Heaven and the entire Endless Love series. Let's just say that just because drama seems to be my forte...doesn't mean I always enjoy writing it.

I know I told you guys that chapter four is gonna be my last, but...yup, it seems I really can't end this on Haru's POV. Seeing as I've already gone and written 4K words already, which is across-the-board the standard chapter length of this fic, I guess it wouldn't hurt for me to write one final 4K, from Mako's POV, since that's what I'm more used to. If things go according to plan, for once...chapter 5 will finally be the end.

The goal is to finish Retrouvaille before Mako's birthday – 11/17 – so yeah, that gives me a week. Wish me luck, guys.

And again, because I will never, ever, get sick of saying this: guys, thank you for reading Retrouvaille! I love you all.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Retrouvaille (Fr., n.) the joy of meeting or finding someone again after a long separation; rediscovery. In a world where Makoto Tachibana and Haruka Nanase don't get to grow up together, would they ever realize that their place will always be with each other? (In true Korean drama fashion, all of this could've been avoided if you just had one proper conversation, you dorks.)

Chapter Notes

For Rei's POV of this chapter, please take a look at the first part of chapter 8 of [The Materiality Principle](#)!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

I wake up to a world where the person I love had told me that he loved me back.

It would be perfect, really, if only I didn't subsequently remember everything that follows.

Then I'd smile and remember that Haru is Haruka *Nanase*, the childhood friend I've been waiting the better half of a decade for, the eccentric and adorable painter I liked long before I got his last name, and last night he said that he *loved* me.

But I'd also remember that right now it's a new day and he won't remember anything he said. He told me himself – *anterograde amnesia* – *I can't make new memories*.

So, what should I do now?

Breakfast is the answer, apparently, because when I open the door I am immediately assaulted by smells of wondrous stuff like omelettes and bacon.

...*Ran's* cooking, then. I've slept in, which is usually fine since it's a weekend and all, but even on those days I usually wake up before them. Damn, they probably think me such a *worthless* elder brother by now –

“Morning, 'niichan!” Ran greets me, her eyes bright as she wields a spatula.

“Morning, Ran...where's Ren?”

“Out jogging, there's some kind of meet coming up that he has to prepare for – my friends *cannot* stop talking about it.” My little sister rolls her eyes, disapproving of how her female friends thought her twin brother was 'attractive'. It seems to be the common denominator of little sisters everywhere – I've seen that look before, on Gou's face. “So he said *I* should do the cooking, so I said *fine*, but he has to do the dishes instead.”

“You should've just woke me up.” I say, carding a hand through my hair. Maybe I should've at least tried to make myself presentable first, but...it doesn't really matter, does it.

“Me? Wake you up? You got home *soooo* late. Like *hell* was I gonna wake you up so soon.” Ran replies. For all her bossiness, Ran still really is a good kid deep down. I can't help it - I smile and reach down to muss her hair.

“Ahh, '*niichan*!” Ran yelps, batting at me with her free hand. “Stop doing that – I'm not a kid!”

“Yeah, I know.” I say, finding myself struck with emotion at the thought. I remember the time when the twins could only reach up to my knees...no, Makoto Tachibana, now is not the time for your midlife crisis. “But I can help you, at least.” I continue on, wishing I sound at least a bit more like the caretaker in this relationship – or at least, more like an *apologetic* caretaker. “Tell me what you want me to do.”

As I step closer to her, however, Ran wrinkles her nose. *Huh?* “I want you to *take a bath*, '*niichan*.”

I frown. The bad thing about having the twins grow up with *Nagisa* and *Rin* is that their trickster level has grown exponentially as the years go by. “Ran, that's *mean* –”

“And I am *only* saying this because your friends called, they'll be visiting later.” Ran sing-songs, back turned from me as she scrapes off omelette from the pan. “I could play saboteur and *not* tell you, but what kind of little sister would I be then?”

“You'd still be the most adorable kind,” I say, mussing her hair again as I pass by. She sputters, but ends up laughing.

“Don't let Gou-*neechan* hear you!” my little sister calls back, as I laugh on the way to the bathroom.

“Mako-chan. You okay?”

“Yeah,” I say, smiling. Before the time Nagisa and Rei had made their way to our house, I've bathed, somehow gotten my hair to follow instruction, and Ran had made me a mean English Breakfast – of *course* I'd feel fine. “Why shouldn't I be?”

“It's because when Rei-chan and I called last night, you didn't *sound* okay - oh, thanks, Ran-chan.”

“That's not for you, yanno.” Ran snaps, swiping the slice of strawberry mousse from Nagisa's grabby hands. Closer inspection tells me that there's a faint dusting of red on her cheeks. “This is for *Rei-senpai*.”

Ran, my little sister – *my little sister* – looks at Rei, one of my best friends – *one of my best friends* - and everything clicks into place. And right now, I know we're in the middle of something but all my mind can think is *aw hell no*.

Okay, so maybe years of Skyping with Rin has made him rub off on me, just a little bit.

“Don't they teach the virtues of *equality* at Iwatobi High anymore?” Nagisa huffs, standing up as Rei murmurs *thank you*, which makes Ran's blushing cheeks reach near-incandescent levels. “This is unfair. I'm gonna get my own piece.” he mutters, heading off to the kitchen.

“What - but no, silly, the one with strawberry topping is *mine*!” Ran cries, as she goes after him.

That leaves me with Rei, then.

“Rei.”

“*Senpai*?” Rei says, warily, as I smile at him.

I’m probably gonna regret saying this in ten minutes, but Rin said it best himself - when I go all-out ‘orca mode’, there’s nowhere else for my temper to go but *up*. I guess I’ll just have to apologize after.

“Think of what *Nagisa* would feel.”

“I don’t understand what you’re saying –”

“See, you’re a good lad, Rei,” I continue, leaning in closer, without even thinking about it. I think I might be showing too much teeth than I ought to. “– and *Nagisa* absolutely *adores* you, but if you *ever* –”

“You do not need to tell me twice, *Makoto-senpai*!” Rei says, hands clapped together in front of his face, as if in prayer. “Rin-san already sent me *warnings*. I am well aware that I am not interested in romance, and that if I ever want to be, the *senpai*’s sisters are not to be involved.”

The weird, tinny voice with which Rei says *warnings* snaps me out of the protective big brother mode I seem to have defaulted to. “Huh? ‘*Warnings*’?”

“You know...*videos*.” Rei murmurs, shivering. “He was wrestling with a *crocodile*.”

“Rei...”

“A *crocodile*, *Makoto-senpai*.” Rei says, holding a hand to his chest in despair, shedding a single tear. “*It was not beautiful at all!*”

“I dunno why I ever expected you to say anything else,” I say, laughing, getting back to my sense. Of course Rei wouldn’t hurt Ran, or Gou, or, when it all comes down to it, *Nagisa*. He really *is* a nice guy.

And besides, those three are all so bossy, that it’ll probably be *Rei* who ends up driven to despondency...

“However.” Rei starts, back at his normal serious baseline, pushing up his glasses. It’s a nervous tic of his, one he’s been doing since we first met him. Rin tried, but he could never train Rei out of it. “...*Makoto-senpai*, I need to tell you something.”

“Go on, then,” I say, picking at my slice of strawberry mousse and wondering what Ran and *Nagisa* have been up to. I’m wishing they aren’t making a mess of the kitchen, as they had last month...but from the smell, I’m guessing they’re making another dessert. That’s how those two sweet-toothed guys compromise.

“This morning, *Nagisa-kun* and I went to visit *Haruka-san*.”

“Oh.”

I don’t know what to say, or feel.

Well, I understand what they wanted to *do*, at least, that they wanted to check up on Haru like they had wanted to check on Rin, on his last flight back to Japan, had wanted to gage whether I people I

was waiting for had been worth it, or something. Rin had passed – gained Nagisa’s attachment and Rei’s adoration – Rei had almost, but not quite barely, been urged to swim upon seeing what he called Rin’s ‘*perfect butterfly*’.

I wonder if Haru passed their ridiculously high standards, too? “What did you think?”

“Well – logically, I can’t see any situation where this could work.” Rei says, his voice in that weird almost-monotone state he assumes when he wants to show people that things don’t faze him. Even when they actually do. “Anterograde amnesia *is* the lack of retention of new memories, after all. Seeing as any kind of relationship would entail making and *remembering* new memories, I fail to see any workarounds.”

“Okay then,” I say. Rei’s neutral, almost clinical, way of looking at things is a break from Nagisa’s drama about ‘*true love*’ and ‘*red strings*’, but sometimes all the idioms really are right and the truth *hurts*, so much so that I can’t say anything more.

My eyes are downcast, so I can’t see how Rei looks like when he looks at me, but his tone shifts into something other than the fake monotone, something almost *hopeful*. “Sometimes Nagisa-kun’s *right*, though. And besides, things don’t have to be easy, because life *isn’t*.” He shakes his head, mumbling. “‘*Nagisa-kun’s right*’, I said. Am I even hearing myself *speak*?”

“Rei...what do you mean?”

“Haruka-san said that the last memory he has of you was of how you looked when he had left Iwatobi.” Rei says, and I remember: the sun was warm against my skin as I stood alongside Haru, squeezing his hand and wanting very much to open my arms and *hug* him but no I just *can’t*, it’ll just make things awkward. I remember bawling like a baby as the train was out of sight, feeling gross as tears dried on my cheeks. Haru saw *that*? How embarrassing.

“And it stuck with him, the whole time he was abroad. Everything he did, all he could think of was about how he had made you sad, and he never really forgave himself. And then...” Rei pauses, his eyes sad. “...then he drowned.” Rei looks off into the distance, eyes fixating on somewhere behind me, as he continues on, in a lower tone of voice: “Nagisa-kun and I heard that the drowning was...*self-inflicted*.”

Now *that’s* something I hadn’t heard before. “Wait, Haru...Haru *drowned*?” *On purpose?*

It couldn’t be possible. Haru, *intentionally* drowning? He always made such a big deal about “*coexisting peacefully*” with the water, about their “*mutual acceptance*” of each other. Maybe through some dark, twisted way that *could* lead to one drowning oneself, to wanting the water to swallow and consume you completely...but that wasn’t Haru at all. *I* was the one who thought that water consumed; that it swallowed up the people I loved and never brought it back. Not Haru - Haru only ever loved the water, because it made him feel free.

I wonder: if *I* were to ask him, would he ever tell me why he did it? I doubt it.

“Anyway, it’s why he can’t swim anymore. I’d wager that’s where the amnesia came into play. I have no idea *why* he did it, though.” Rei says.

“Makoto-senpai, you must know, however, that I am not telling you this to guilt you into running to his side like...like you seem to want to right now.” He sighs, looking pointedly at the way my hands clench into fists. I notice him looking, and unclench. “It’s just that if there’s something I’m sure needs to be more of, it’s the completeness of information, and since Nagisa-kun *already* bullied me into telling Haruka-san how you felt without him, it was only right that I let you know

how he felt without you.”

“When does Nagisa *not* bully you into doing stuff?” I say, raising an eyebrow, trying not to think too hard about how Haru woke up to another clean slate and besides from my embarrassing teenage sobbing, he now has to know that I was *miserable* without him, as well.

“That’s not the point, Makoto-senpai.” Rei sighs, carding a hand through his hair. “You haven’t gotten it yet?”

“Huh?”

“It’s not important, whether or not he’ll remember you exactly as he’s supposed to.” he says, sighing. Like he was explaining matters to a kindergartener. I should be offended, shouldn’t I? “What matters, is – I cannot *believe* I am saying this – what you *feel*. There’s someone you want to be with, no matter what, isn’t there?”

Rei’s looking at me, with an intensity I swear I haven’t seen, *ever*. There’s so much faith and hope in those eyes that all I can think of right now is how I don’t want to let him down. As both his *senpai* and his friend, I want to live up to what those eyes think I am.

So I swallow down all my apprehension, all my worry, all my doubt, say “*Haru*,” and surprise myself with how my voice cracks - wasn’t I supposed to be done with that already? - and swallow that down too, carrying on. “*I want to be with Haru*.”

“There you have it, then!” Rei says, and the tentative expression on his face morphs into an all-out grin. It’s no Nagisa-level grin, but it’s close enough - it’s the same third of motivation that kept me carrying on, through all those years without Haru. If that’s what Nagisa brings out in him, then they truly are lucky to have found each other. “We’ll be rooting for you both, Makoto-senpai.”

Today seems to be a day for reunions, it seems, for when Nagisa and Rei finally say their goodbyes to me – and to Ran’s tomato-red cheeks, seriously, *seriously* – Rin gives me a call.

Apparently the dynamic duo had hounded him, time differences be damned, and had told him about Haru and I. I know this, not because he tells me, but because as soon as his webcam flips on there’s an mischievous twinkle to his eyes as he says, “*Unbelievable*.”

“What is?” I say, playing my part at being chipper.

“Y’know, you and Haru.” Rin clarifies, raising up two hands, probably intending to mime ‘*you and Haru*’. There’s what seems to be a can of mackerel in one of his hands, so yup, that one’s *definitely* Haru. “The world’s got seven billion people in it – what’re the odds that the Haru you knew and the Haru you met were one and the same? *Seriously*.”

“Well,” I mutter, looking away from Rin. He’s a good friend, really, but *way* too much of a romantic for his own good. What *should* I say? Ahh...Rei told me once that logic is the only thing stronger than romance. So maybe I’ll use that somehow... “If you consider how I didn’t move away from Iwatobi, and how we share the same hometown, you could say that the odds would actually be more likely...”

“Makoto. Are *you* lecturing *me* on statistics, mate? *Me*?” Rin huffs, a hand dramatically pressed to his chest. It’s a relief he and Nagisa don’t get together often – I don’t think I would be able to handle such a massive amount of theatrics.

“Yeah, so?” I say, parroting Rin’s haughty tone in an attempt to further my bluff. “I happen to be a

teacher, Rin.”

From behind the laptop screen, Rin rolls his eyes. “But you're *horrible* at math, Makoto.”

I'm about to say something back, but my doorbell rings and so I throw Rin an apologetic look instead. “I'll be answering the door?”

“Go on, don't mind me, 's your house anyway.” Rin replies, shooing me away from the screen with an extravagant wave of his hand. I chuckle softly, shaking my head as I head to the foyer, looking at the screen on top of the buzzer –

“!!!”

From the laptop I can hear things rustling on Rin's end, like he's moved closer, but it's pretty hard to hear that over my rapidly increasing heartbeat. It sounds like a snare drum, in my ears. Can Rin hear it? Can the person behind the door hear it? It's amazing how they don't seem to hear it, it's just so *loud*.

“Makoto. Something wrong?”

“...it's *Haru*.” I say, not believing my words. How does he know where I live? I don't remember telling him, back when he was just a painter and I was just a teacher who met him in front of the ocean.

“*Seriously??*” Rin asks, voice ecstatic. I look back at the screen, and – yup, that's Haru all right, rocking back and forth on the balls of his feet like he used to when we were children.

...the Haru I *love* is the same Haru I used to know *when we were children*. I still couldn't wrap my mind properly around the very concept.

So I nod instead. “*It's Haru*.”

“Yes, Makoto, you have made that fact *very* clear.”

I decide to file away my best friend's rampant sarcasm for later, because for now my mouth just can't stop making words on its own. “He's *here*, Rin.”

As I look back at the laptop screen Rin is rubbing his hands in glee, a big smile on his face showcasing his trademark ‘shark teeth’, which Rin always says make him look cool. I'd beg to differ, but his fans actually *do* like them... “Good! Now, if you're *done* stating the obvious, do us all a favour and let 'im in, Makoto.”

The two steps across my foyer shouldn't be of any trouble to me, but somehow it is and I trip over my own feet before I get to the door. I can hear Rin laughing at me, the speakers bringing his chuckles all the long way from Australia, and I blush because *damn it*, Rin is never *ever* gonna let me live this down, isn't he?

All thought of that vanishes, however, because the door opens and *Haru* is in front of me. Painter Haru, childhood Haru, amnesiac Haru, all-I-could-ever-want Haru, the Haru who had told me he loved me. But I guess he's forgotten that, by now.

I'm dazed as I take in every inch of him – from his jittery feet to his lovely blue eyes to the way the hairs on his head curl over his brow *just so*. This is especially obvious, apparently, because Rin starts catcalling, and a dark flush grows on Haru's cheeks as he clears his throat.

“You never changed your address,” Haru says, almost *shyly*. This makes my heart skip a beat, yet again – he’s forgotten a lot of things, but he still remembers *my address*??

Knowing full well that if I dwell on such self-serving things I would only put myself at risk for emotion-related cardiac arrest, I clear my throat before replying. “Well, it’s a family house, Haru, and besides, I teach at Iwatobi Elementary. So I never really thought of moving out.” Suddenly hyperaware of our proximity, I make a sweeping hand gesture. “Come inside, you’ll get cold.”

As we enter the living room, however, Rin has begun belting out love songs. Sappy love songs. The kind of which would not be out of place in the soaps Mom and the twins love watching.

“*Shush*, Rin. Even if you’re a hotshot over there in Australia, you’re still such a hopeless person.” I say, shaking my head as I pick up the laptop. “I remember that Ran wanted to talk to you.”

Rin pouts. It’s something so reminiscent of *Nagisa*, more than anything, and it looks hilariously out-of-place on his face. “You’re no fun. So I don’t get to watch how the love interests make up?”

My cheeks are red and – and I think Haru’s are too, seeing as he’s huddled deeper into his scarf. Scarves look really good on Haru – wait, I was supposed to be doing something. “If you don’t act nice, *Rin-Rin*, you won’t get any news *at all*.”

“Fine, ‘*Mom*’.” Rin concedes in a cloyingly-sweet babyish tone, before reverting back to his normal one. “So long as I get to talk to ‘Dad’ after.”

“Huh?”

The next words out of Rin’s mouth are obviously not for me, because he’s looking – no, *glaring* – at something behind me. “Haru. Settle stuff with Makoto. After that, I have a bone to pick with you.”

Haru...doesn’t say anything, only nods.

After putting the laptop in Ran’s capable hands – that girl can talk up a storm, it’s something I have to pick up from her, so that I don’t endlessly bore people with my incessant, unfocused rambling – I go back to Haru. I’d offer him tea, but he doesn’t like that, either.

“Your friends say we need to talk,” Haru says, his voice so small and quiet. It’s not a tone I like to hear him use.

“I’m so sorry if they told you anything weird, Haru.” Weird like me sobbing like an infant when you left. It’s no wonder Haru wouldn’t want to contact me again, if *that’s* the last thing he remembers – who’d want to be best friends with a guy as clingy as me?

“They didn’t tell me anything weird.” Haru says, eyes placid as he looks down at the carpet. That won’t do. “You’re lucky to have them.”

“I guess I am,” I say, willing away an errant thought that wants to say, *if only you were here, they would’ve been **your** friends too, Haru*, because the past is the past and there’s nothing we can do about it but accept it. “Hey, don’t look down, Haru – look at me. *Please*.”

He doesn’t follow my instructions, only looks down even more as he speaks. “Why do you still want to see me?”

“Haru?”

“You have friends who obviously care about you. You’re good at your job; you actually like taking care of people. Nagisa told me a swanky Tokyo elementary school wanted to hire you. Your siblings adore you; *everyone* adores you.” Haru says, voice an eerie, robotic monotone. “I’m just the guy who left you and made you sad - *why do you still want to see me?*”

“But that’s,” We’ve been dancing around this for months now, possibly even years, but when the dam is broken, I guess the words just can’t help but flow. “That’s because I love you, Haru. Of course I’d always want to see you.”

“How sure are you, though?” Haru murmurs. “I’ll forget you every day, and I won’t remember how much I love you, because I’ll always have to have you there to remind me. How sure are you that what you’re feeling right now isn’t just something you’re feeling because *you feel sorry for me?*”

He glares at me. I look at him, and you can hear a pin drop, if there was one to drop in the vicinity.

“Haru, is that what you really think?”

“I’ll forget you every day, Makoto. *Each and every day*, I’ll have to depend on what *other people* say, on what *you* say. You’re *obsessed* with taking care of people. So that’s that.”

I can see where Haru’s coming from, but – but he’s just *so stubborn*, he has to learn to let *me* make *my* decisions.

“Do you remember the promise I made you, when we were little?”

There’s a sudden flash of recognition in Haru’s eyes, something good and bright and *sparkling*, but he chases that away with a sudden shake of his head. “Is *that* it, then?”

“Back then, back then, I promised that I would always be there for you.”

“Makoto, *I* was the one who broke it off first. You don’t have to make up for my mistake, and besides –”

“*What I’m saying is*,” I emphasize, cutting off whatever it is that Haru might think would convince me off of loving him back. Like it would work – absence hadn’t, and neither did time. “I had already been in love with you, back then.”

“So *please*, don’t tell me that I’m just feeling sorry for you because you’re more than that to me, Haru. I had fun in high school, with Rin and the others, but there was always going to be something missing. I went through college wondering what things could’ve been if you were my roommate. I never even wanted to move out of Iwatobi; in the back of my mind I was still hoping I’d get to see you again.”

“Makoto...”

“And now here you are, again.” I say, smiling at him. “I’ve had a decade. I think I’m pretty sure about what I feel.”

“But Makoto, I won’t have a decade. Maybe I used to, maybe *I did* love you for a decade, too, but I wouldn’t remember it. Couldn’t remember it.” Haru says, looking down again.

I move closer, tilt his chin up with my hand. There, *now* he’s looking at me. “...stop doing that.” Haru snaps.

“Doing what?”

“Being *distracting*.” Haru huffs, brushing away my hand, but – but at least now, he isn’t looking away. “I’ll love you, sure, but I’ll only be in love with you for twenty-four hours at a time.”

I shrug. I already knew that he’d be using that as his defense. “That’s fine with me.”

“Wouldn’t that be unfair for you? You said you’d been in love for a *decade* –?”

I shrug. “Then I’ll just have to fall for you every twenty-four hours, too. To even the playing field.”

“Makoto, that’s *stupid*.”

“See, Haru, if that’s all you’re worrying about, then stop. Because I’d gladly be stupid, I’d *gladly* fall in love with you each and every single day, if that means...” I click my tongue, sigh, and thank all the deities above that the guys aren’t here to hear me at my sappiest. “If that means that we can be together until the end.”

I’m expecting Haru to be as silent as he had been the day that I told him I wanted to swim with him even if I was scared of the ocean, but strangely, he isn’t. “...what *end*?” he asks, carefully.

“Nothing in particular, just...just, the uncertain, distant ‘end’ that people always talk about when it comes to these things.” I reply, lamely, a hand at my nape in embarrassment. “Look, Haru...I know you don’t remember, but last night, when you told me you loved me, I didn’t even think whether or not your feelings were based solely on the last twenty-four hours, because I believe you. I *always* do. And I really love you, too, I’ll always mean it. I know it’s hard to believe, but you have to trust me on this.”

“...fine then,” Haru says, cheeks flushed as he burrows deeper into the folds of his scarf. “Don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

“Haru, I don’t care if you breathe fire or have six-foot wings, or if you have a curse that would end the world, or if I have to eat mackerel every single day. As long as you’re here, I know we can do anything.” I look him straight in the eyes – those beautiful, *beautiful* eyes – and swallow down the final bits of my apprehension. “So here’s my question, Haru: do *you* want to be with *me*?”

Haru gulps, and I can hear every frantic beat of my chest, until he says “*Yes*,” because then I’m so overwhelmed that all I want to do is *hug him hug him now* so that’s what I do. I wrap my arms around him, I’m just so *happy*.

And when his arms, *Haru’s arms*, reach up to pull me closer, my heart beats so fast it’s a miracle I’m still alive.

Guess that’s how things are, when you’re in love.

Makoto’s had his ‘word’ with his partner – things have gone well, judging by our pretty-boy’s dazed smile and flushed cheeks – so I guess it’s my turn.

...not my turn to hug Haru, or to kiss him, because he’s good as my best friend’s boyfriend by now and that, that would only make things weird. And besides, I have a bone to pick with him, it’s not like I’d want to kiss this brat if it were otherwise.

“Haru. Listen to me.” I say, doing my best to glare at the webcam and hoping to hell and back that

Haru's listening, that he's actually not as unfocused as his damned poker face says he is. "I don't care if you need to write this down - I'll email you *every goddamned day* if you want me to, just please, dammit, *remember*."

"What do you mean, Rin?" Haru asks, tilting his head, like a child. He *really* hasn't changed, it's a goddamned miracle Makoto hadn't got it immediately. Maybe he had just been so lovestruck he couldn't even think straight??

"Take care of Makoto." I say. "I *tried*, yanno, when you left, but it just wasn't the same. I'm not what he's looking for, but *you* are, and if anyone can make this work it's gonna be the two of you."

"But life doesn't work like your romance novels," Haru says, and I swear the guy's shitting me because he's *smirking*, which in Haru-world means that his grin has reached Nagisa-levels of happiness. "...*Rin-Rin*."

"Hey, dude, stop calling me that! I'm being all serious here." I yell at the webcam, as Haru closes his eyes and continues smirking. Mood lifted for a moment, I sink deeper into my computer chair and spin around. Makoto always told me to stop doing that, but he isn't here to berate me so he'll have to just *deal with it*, okay. "I know that, obviously. But I believe in him, I always have, and even if you screwed things up epically and didn't follow my *glorious* advice of just making a Facebook account -"

"- Rin -"

"- I believe in you, Haru. Makoto still does, too. Don't let that be for nothing." I say, taking my gaze away from the fibers of my carpeting. How can a man be taken seriously if he can't even look someone in the eye, just because their best friend is in love with said someone? *Stop being such a baby, Rin*. "You guys better make my teeth rot when I come back, or I'll show you *sights you've never seen before*." And, just in case he's still dense as a brick and doesn't get it, I append: "With my *roundhouse*."

"Is that supposed to scare me?"

"Nope. That's supposed to *warn* ya. There's a difference." Because Haru never gets scared of *anything* and it's a fundamental part of what makes him so damned perfect for a scaredy-cat like our Makoto. If anything, the idea of how distressed Makoto would be if I ever *did* kick Haru halfway around the world would be all the warning he'd ever need. "See you around, Haru."

And I will, scheds and stuff be damned, I really will. And when I see him, he better be making my best friend happy.

Epilogue – some months (??) later

We're walking home as we see Iwatobi's first snowfall; the white puffs of snow and the serene, dark night sky lend our usual spot an ethereal look. In the midst of all this white, I can almost see them: the place where his easel usually stands, the railing I usually lean over – or cling to, as the occasion may call for it.

Haru has *seriously* got to stop being good at telling horror stories.

"Please, Haru, not today, it's dark out and I'm too tired to *not* believe in anything that you say." I

say, slumping against him and his warmth. Haru harrumphs grandly, only to shake his head and lean in closer to me, as well. He's a sweet guy, he really is. It's always the cool ones who care the most.

"Fine. I love you, then."

"But *Haru*," I whine, as Haru chuckles softly. "If it's you saying it, I'll believe that every time!"

Haru hums, only to gain a faraway look as he wonders, "What if I tell you that I *don't* love you, instead?"

Okay, so that. *That* sobers me. "Well – well if that's what you'll say, then I guess I'll have to believe you, too."

Haru clicks his tongue, and whips out his recorder from one of his coat pockets. "Note to self – do not forget, I have feelings for Makoto. To clarify: I love him. To further clarify: Haruka Nanase loves Makoto Tachibana." He shakes his head. "The things I do for you, honestly. There, now I'll be in love with you for the next twenty-four hours, too."

I smile back, so much so that it feels like my face might just rip apart at the seams. "I'll be looking forward to them."

"So far, though: spending the day with you, mackerel, snow, a *pool*?" Haru says, eyes sparkling. "Best twenty-four hours I remember."

He's still not fit to swim yet – I doubt he ever will be, not in his former capacity at least – but I had argued that maybe a little dip in an indoor pool won't be so bad, once in a while. So that's how we both got into swimming again. Even if it's only for fifty meters at a time, even if he forgets it every time, Haru's slowly grown to become more sure of himself, dare I say even more happy, and that's always a good thing.

"Same here," I say, pressing my lips to the crown of his head. "I'm looking forward to falling for you, again."

Haru raises an eyebrow at me, a small smirk forming at the corners of his – very, *very* distracting – lips. "You're *still* not sick of it, then?"

"Oh, Haru, I'll never get sick of it. Nor will I get sick of reminding you." I say, preparing my words. This has been somewhat of a ritual between us, and it goes on each and every day, even if for all intents and purposes *I'm* the only one who's supposed to be remembering it. "Haru. I will fall in love with you over and over, if it means..."

I take in a deep breath, and just as he does every day, we finish our sentence together. "...we'll be together, until the very end."

And as long as his hand is in mine and my heart is in his, I know that we will.

Chapter End Notes

Since I seem to love making parallels...what Rei says to Makoto-senpai about Haru here is meant to mirror what he tells Haru in ep 12, about Rin. The thing about making Haru the one who moved away, and Rin being the golden boy, is that the dynamic

they have with each other has shifted dramatically – especially so from the POV of Rei, seeing as he doesn't know these guys from their *High Speed!* days, which are the only parts of them I've left unchanged.

So his idolization of Haru in canon shifts to Rin – because he swims beautifully with the aid of theory and calculation, which could almost drive him to swimming if only he can't swim and if only Iwatobi didn't have a swim club. Likewise, his annoyance at Rin shifts to Haru – because just as Rin left and seems to have made things hard on Haru in canon, in this AU Haru left and seems to have made his Makoto-senpai miserable. If there's one thing I've left unchanged about Rei – save the diligence, dorkiness, and illegally-toned body – it's that he always looks out for his friends, which I think is really cool. (Another thing is that he has Nagisa, but that's another story entirely...)

As for the ages...I dunno how old they'll be after college, as well as how old they would be upon snagging the jobs I had then have, under the Japanese system. In the first drafts I eyeballed the twins as 8/9 y/o in the canon timeline, giving them a 9/10 year age gap with Mako-niichan. Then I found out that in High Speed, they were in kindergarten when Mako was 12/13, and the Japanese kindergarten age is so vague to me - the only thing I see on Google is that it's for kids 4/5 y/o, giving them a...8/9 year age-gap. So since Ran is 17 here - the same age as her big bro in anime canon - it is then correct that I made Makoto 26.

Also: in the Philippine system, someone taking up a 4yr course would normally graduate at 19/20/21 (under the pre-K12 system), and a CPA would have to have three years of meaningful work XP to sign off on stuff. Thus making it possible for Rei to get the swanky job I gave him...urghhh. Either way, he was promoted quickly. I have got to stop hounding Retrouvaille with notes more related to its spin-off.

So here's the end (for now), darlings! It took me a month, I know, I'm sorry. There was supposed to be a whole lot more angst and heartbreak and...almost-drowning, and stuff, but mum told me to tone back on the misery a little, and I really, really just wanted to have silly meddling friends in the mix, so I hope you guys won't be too disappointed as to how this went down.

If you should know, Mako and Haru are now happily pre-engaged (silly term I made up for being 'almost-married but not-married boyfriends'), Haru has since upgraded to a video recall system and successfully held his first exhibit (full of ocean paintings, that one painting of Makoto's back, and that other painting which was supposed to be kid!Makoto pulling him out of a pool). Mako is currently v. v. happy with this state of affairs, and he's been given commendations for his students' high marks in national exams, and he can't be any more happy...well, maybe he *could* be happier, if his sister would just stop making eyes at Rei. Why did he have to have attractive male friends, *why??*

I love you all, guys, please don't forget that! And also, thanks for reading! Retrouvaille was not the easiest thing to write, but knowing that you guys liked it, somehow, made it special for me. Thank you, and again, thank you!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!

